THE BIBLE OF BOXING

The Ring

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ONE OF A KIND

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MARCH 2017

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A good fight between Andre Ward (left) and Sergey Kovalev was marred by controversy.

AP

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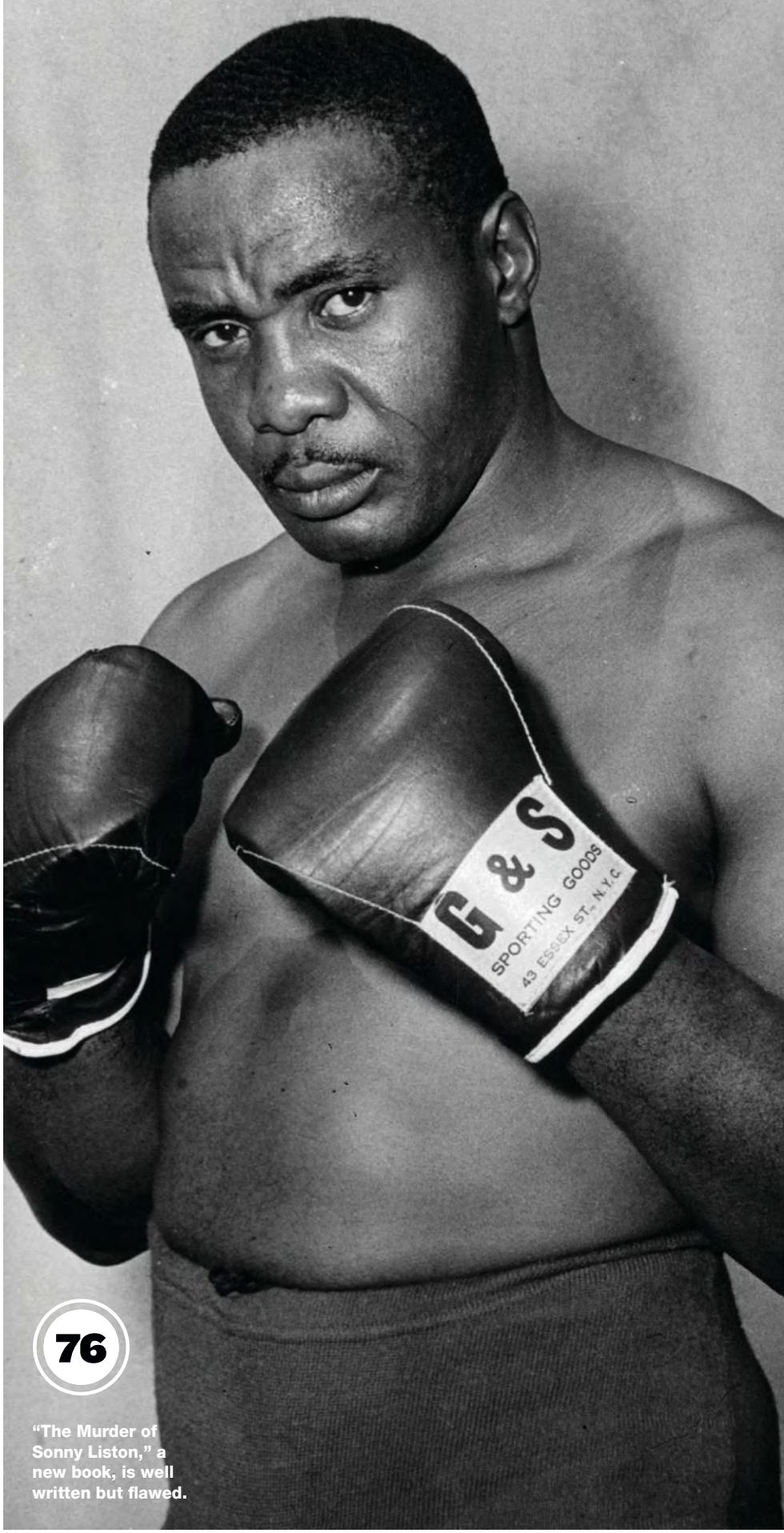
PROTEGE CHERISHES TIME WITH TRAINER
GO TO: http://bit.do/angelo-dundee



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"The Murder of Sonny Liston," a new book, is well written but flawed.

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The RING

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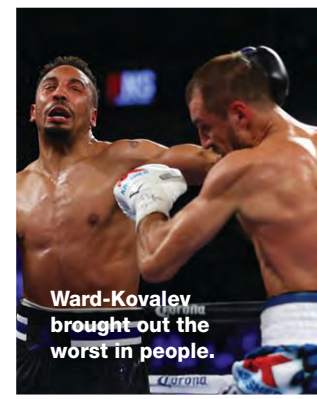
OVER THE TOP

The Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev fight was a lesson in humility, both for me and (I could only hope) for some others.

I predicted that Ward was too talented for Kovalev, that he would baffle the Russian with his boxing skills and win a clear decision on November 19 in Las Vegas. I dismissed those who believed Ward wasn't the same fighter who won the Super Six World Boxing Classic in 2011, although I said repeatedly, "We'll see."

We saw. Ward wasn't the same fighter and I clearly underestimated Kovalev, who matched both wits and punches with Ward.


Ward-Kovalev brought out the worst in people.

Ward won a close decision – 114-113 on all three cards – but that certainly didn't save me. I was flat out wrong, a fact I could live with given the quality of the fight. I'd trade being right for a compelling battle any time.

I have more trouble accepting the arrogance of some who believed Kovalev earned a one-sided decision.

I understand that knowledgeable people see fights differently, particularly close fights. And I humbly believe that's what this was. I also appreciate the passion with which these people expressed their opinions, as perceived injustices are difficult to swallow.

One can go too far, though. And that's what happened in this case.

The majority of seasoned observers who typically reveal their scoring of big fights had Kovalev winning but many people of the same caliber scored the fight for Ward, including me. And I feel comfortable in saying that a high percentage of those who gave Kovalev the nod feel the fight was close.

That didn't matter to those who were most outraged by the decision, some of whom went so far as to question the integrity of people who disagreed with them. One prominent fighter implied strongly in a tweet that anyone who thought Ward won the fight was "dishonest," as if they were bought off or part of some kind of pro-American conspiracy.

I know well a number of established writers who scored the fight for Ward. They've been doing this for a long time; they know their stuff. And they for damn sure have integrity. They stood to gain nothing if Ward won the fight; they scored it as they saw it.

Why would they do otherwise?

One colleague suggested to me that I might've scored the fight for Ward to justify my prediction. I responded by saying that everyone has preconceptions going into big fights and many express them publicly, as I did.

My goal as a journalist over the past three decades has been to put preconceptions aside and be as objective as possible, as I did when I scored this fight. I honestly thought Kovalev won four of the first six rounds but then lost five of the last six, which accounts for my score of 114-113 for Ward.

That's how I saw it, not how I wanted to see it.

The point is this: It's OK to disagree with people when it comes to scoring fights. It's even OK to express bewilderment at the scoring of others; God knows I've done that countless times. Just don't question their integrity unless you have evidence to support it. That's just not right.

PROTEX

Two-time Olympic gold medalist Claressa Shields (right) made an impression on Franchon Crews and the fans in her pro debut.

ANDRE WARD VS. SERGEY KOVALEV

CONSPIRACY?

Clearly the corrupt boxing establishment felt that the moribund sport of boxing needed to have some life breathed into it by *ensuring* that there will be a Kovalev-Ward rematch. This was already clear during the undercard, when a bogus draw was scored between Maurice Hooker and Darleys Perez just to get the viewing audience prepared for shoddy scorecards following the main event. Then, during the main event itself, Max Kellerman's disgustingly biased commentary made it seem close when, in actual fact, it was a rout for Kovalev. Jim Lampley's post-fight commentary about former Soviet Union boxers benefitting from biased decisions in Olympic boxing (during the Cold War era) seemed intended to justify a horribly flawed decision against Kovalev. Even Kovalev's promoter, Kathy Duva, seemed insufficiently incensed with the decision at the post-fight press conference. After all, it was a great fight, and clearly the whole event was rigged in such a way as to *ensure* that a lucrative rematch take place. Boxing fans were played for fools. Somewhere in Russia I can hear President-elect Donald Trump's new friend, Vladimir Putin, say with justified contempt, "система подстроена" (the system is rigged).

Jake VanderKooy, Ph.D.
York University (Glendon campus)
Toronto

KOVALEV HAD NO CHANCE

Unless Kovalev scored a knockout, there was little, if any chance he would have been awarded the win. First, the fight took place in the U.S. in front of a fiercely partisan crowd, and second, it was presided over by three American judges and an American referee, Robert Byrd. So the deck was heavily stacked against the Russian. A hometown decision was very possible, especially in a close fight – which this was. If there is a silver lining, there's a rematch clause, although rematches have a way of being delayed into a shadowy future, especially if the challenger is as dangerous as Kovalev would be. If I were negotiating for Kovalev, I would insist that the bout should be held in a neutral country and all three judges be from neutral countries. But now that the title is in U.S. hands, none of that is likely to happen. Yet another black eye for the sport we'd otherwise love so much.

Patrick Tee
Westmount, Quebec, Canada

VIEW FROM U.K.

The way I see it Kovalev won, especially with a knockdown. But all credit to our Sky Sports commentary team in the U.K., who in the main had it for Ward, especially Paulie Malignaggi, who is great to listen to and went against all expert opinions and boxing journalists. He was in no doubt Ward won. I watched my taping of the fight and can see why so many found the contest hard to score, with so many varied opinions. But even on the rerun I still had Kovalev the winner with respect. There has to be a rematch. Kovalev complained of political scoring by all three American judges. I suppose if you have all three Americans, then it invites comments like that. Shouldn't they have been neutral?

Ray Fox
Keighley, England

HAWK TIME

"The Hawk" was a special fighter. In his prime, I can't see him losing at 140. His insane offensive pace combined with his steel chin and unyielding will would have made him a nightmare for the greatest junior welterweights, including Julio Cesar Chavez and Kostya Tszyu. Unless you had military-grade weaponry, you simply weren't taking him out. The man was an incredible competitor and one of the best to ever lace 'em up. RIP champ!

Jamie Rebner
Montreal

OVERDUE RETIREMENT

The decline of Roy Jones Jr. has been a 12-year, slow-moving train wreck that has all but wiped away the memories of his era and aura of invincibility, which mesmerized us from his masterclass performance against James Toney in 1994 until his shocking two-round destruction by Tarver in 2004. In a recent interview Jones said he was "addicted to boxing" and wanted to continue to "challenge himself against the world's best." Roy, "Rockin" Rodney Moore is not the world's best, and at 47 you aren't Bernard Hopkins. There's a place called Canastota and it's calling your name. Go to it and let us remember the way you once were.

Brad Morris
Astoria, New York

TV CONFUSION

I have read the article "Is Premier Boxing Champions Burning Out" (on RingTV.com). I think the article may be correct in some ways, but as a boxing fan I think the article is missing the point. I don't care in the least what their budget is or whom they have under contract. I watch all of the boxing I can. The problem with PBC is locating it. It moves from channel to channel, network to network and my PVR can't locate it as the description changes all the time based on who is fighting. When huge shows like "Big Bang Theory" lose audience when the time or date changes, it is no small wonder that PBC is having problems retaining audience.

Kyle Federowich
Alberta, Canada

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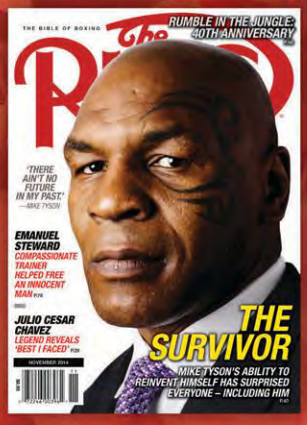

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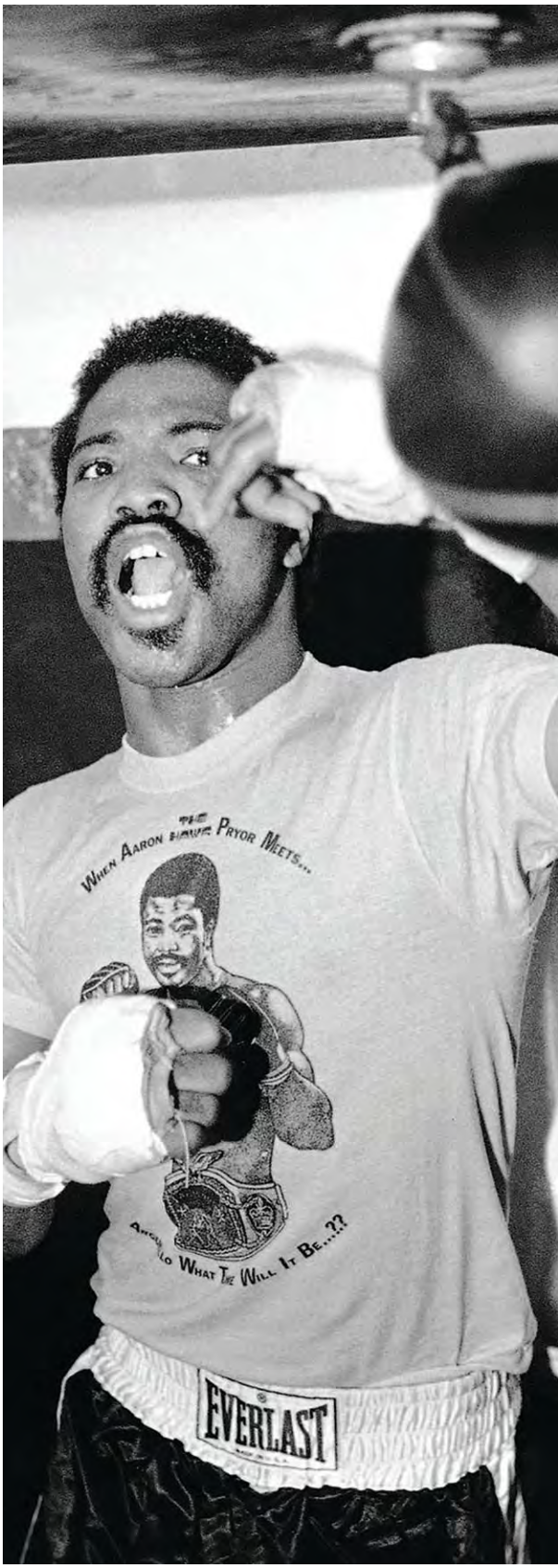
ADVANCED DEGREES

ARMSTRONG: RING MAGAZINE

Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. This month, regular contributor Gregg Morgan connected two punching machines who were often compared to one another – the great **Henry Armstrong** and **Aaron Pryor**, who died on Oct. 9. They were linked in only five steps even though Pryor retired 45 years after Armstrong.

HENRY ARMSTRONG
fought
SUGAR RAY ROBINSON,
who fought
DENNY MOYER,
who fought
RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ,
who fought
CARL CROWLEY,
who fought
AARON PRYOR



Aaron Pryor (right) had an aggressive style similar to that of Henry Armstrong (left). We linked them in surprisingly few steps.

10 A MONTHLY BOXING LIST

This month: Manny Pacquiao has now gone 12 fights and seven years without scoring a knockout, after his unanimous-decision victory over Jessie Vargas on November 5. Pacquiao's last 10 KOs stretch back over 13 years. Here they are:

MIGUEL COTTO
Nov. 14, 2009 (TKO 12) »

RICKY HATTON
May 2, 2009 (KO 2)

OSCAR DE LA HOYA
Dec. 6, 2008 (TKO 8)

DAVID DIAZ
June 28, 2008 (TKO 9)

JORGE SOLIS
April 14, 2007 (KO 8)

Manny Pacquiao stopped Miguel Cotto (left) in the final round.

ERIK MORALES
Nov. 18, 2006 (KO 3)

ERIK MORALES
Jan. 21, 2006 (TKO 10)

HECTOR VELAZQUEZ
Sept. 10, 2005 (TKO 6)

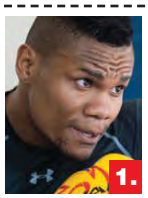
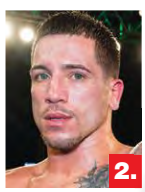
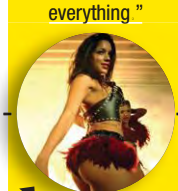
FAHSAN 3K BATTERY
Dec. 11, 2004 (TKO 4)

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA
Nov. 15, 2003 (TKO 11)

FIGHTERS' FAVORITES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ WHAT BOXERS ARE INTO OUTSIDE THE SPORT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. ELEIDER ALVAREZ LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CONTENDER / **2. JASON SOSA** JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT CONTENDER / **LUIS CONCEPCION** JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER

FIGHTER	MUSIC	CAR	FOOD	TATTOOS	ATHLETE OUTSIDE BOXING	MOVIE	VIDEO GAME
 1.	"My favorite music is Valenato. It is from Colombia and me and my family, we like that music a lot."	"I'm not driving right now, but the car of my dreams is a **Cadillac."**	"I love fish."	"Yes, I have three tattoos: one on the back, name of my mother and daughter; one on my forearm, my nickname; and another one on my left shoulder, dedication to my late mother."	"I don't have a favorite athlete outside of boxing, but I've always had admiration for the former Colombian boxer Antonio "Kid Pambele" Cervantes."	"'**Friday**,' a good comedy with Ice Cube."	"I like all the FIFA soccer games!"
 2.	"I love my Christian music, but I listen to a little bit of everything."  **"Bachata (Dominican dance music)."**	"I drive an IS250 Lexus; right now the car I have is dream car."	**"Seafood"** "Jumbo shrimp."	"I have my first name on my left arm and my last name on my right arm. On my left arm I have a warrior that goes onto my chest. my right arm, I have two praying hands."	"I would have to say at the time it was Jason Kidd. Now would probably have to be **Stephen Curry**." "Lionel Messi."	"I'm a movie guy, I see a lot of them. I would probably have to say 'John Wick.'"	"I don't play many video games. If I do, I play sports games."
3.		"I drive a Hyundai Elantra, but I am more a motorcycle fan. My dream is a Kawasaki Ninja."		"I have seven tattoos: the names of my daughters, my sister, my mother and a dragon in my shoulder."		"'Fast and Furious.'"	**"'FIFA 2016.'"**

— Anson Wainwright

THE BEST AND WORST IN BOXING FROM THE PAST MONTH By **Michael Rosenthal**

GOOD

The Good, Bad and Worse column is devoted to a disappointing 2016. There was some good. I think first of the **Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev** fight. The fascinating matchup was an example of what boxing should be, supremely talented fighters risking everything in a bid for greatness. Another good example was one of the most memorable fights this past year, Carl Frampton's impressive victory over Leo Santa Cruz. Frampton challenged himself in an old-school way in 2016, fighting (and beating) Scott Quigg and then immediately moving up in weight to face Santa Cruz. Well done, Carl. I'm stating the obvious when I say we saw far too few of such matchups this past year, a disturbing trend that inhibits the sport's ability to thrive. That said, I'm optimistic. Ward-Kovalev is evidence that boxing can get it right. And there are many more examples that engender hope. Vasyl Lomachenko was scheduled to fight Nicholas Walters on Nov. 26. Exciting. Keith Thurman was set to face Danny Garcia immediately following his victory over Shawn Porter. Great stuff. The list can go on if the fighters and those who handle them are willing to take the risks necessary to keep fans engaged.

BAD

I could start here with talk of a second fight between **Floyd Mayweather Jr.** and **Manny Pacquiao** in 2017. That's the last thing boxing needs, another highly hyped and highly boring dud. I hope it doesn't happen. I must also mention the fans' unrequited demand that Canelo Alvarez face Gennady Golovkin in a middleweight showdown. I feel Canelo has been treated unfairly in spite of his clumsy comments; he shouldn't be coerced into tangling with a monster like Triple-G until he feels he's ready. The fans' frustration is real, though. They weren't happy that Canelo fought Amir Khan and Liam Smith instead of Golovkin. They're angry. The good news is that Canelo vs. Triple-G will happen, almost certainly in 2017. And, finally, there are all those less-than-compelling matchups. Two examples: Pacquiao fought Jessie Vargas (eh) when he could've fought Terence Crawford and Anthony Joshua was scheduled to fight Eric Molina (ugh) on December 10 after talk he might meet Wladimir Klitschko. Such matchups alienate fans, who deserve better. Let's hope Pacquiao-Crawford and Joshua-Klitschko happen and that other fighters follow that lead.

WORSE

The most depressing aspect of a depressing year was the heavyweight division. The colorful **Tyson Fury** shook up the moribund weight class with his stunning decision over Klitschko in November 2015. The result instantly made the division interesting again. And then, very quickly, everything fell apart. Fury's mental issues scuttled a rematch with Klitschko and put his career on hold, as he has stepped away from the sport to deal with his problems. As a result of that and the canceled fight between Deontay Wilder and Alexander Povetkin, not one important heavyweight fight has taken place since Fury-Klitschko I. So much for pumping life into the division. Sad. This is where my optimism resurfaces, though. Joshua probably will fight Klitschko in what would be an enormous event in Europe, one that could fill a soccer stadium in the U.K. And Wilder looms. I imagine Joshua knocking out the quadragenarian Klitschko to ring in a new heavyweight era and then taking on fellow youngster Wilder in a titanic clash of unbeaten big men, the kind of matchup fans of the division dream of. Yes, there is hope.

RING POLL

A MONTHLY POLL OF OUR RINGTV.COM READERS

Boxing fans are always hopeful that they'll see compelling matchups as each new year approaches. With that in mind, we asked: **Which of these fights would you most like to see in 2017?** Here is how you responded.

THE PERCENTAGES

48.53	CANELO ALVAREZ VS. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
14.97	FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. VS. MANNY PACQUIAO II
9.39	MANNY PACQUIAO VS. TERENCE CRAWFORD
9.07	ANTHONY JOSHUA VS. DEONTAY WILDER
4.17	VASYL LOMACHENKO VS. MIKEY GARCIA
3.52	KELL BROOK VS. AMIR KHAN
3.45	TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. ERROL SPENCE
2.86	ROMAN GONZALEZ VS. NAOYA INOUE
2.18	KEITH THURMAN VS. ERROL SPENCE
1.27	ROMAN GONZALEZ VS. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA II
0.59	CARL FRAMPTON VS. LEE SELBY

NOTE: 2,205 READERS VOTED

Meldrick Taylor has great respect for his greatest rival, Julio Cesar Chavez (right).

MELDRICK TAYLOR

38-8-1 (20 KOs)

Meldrick Taylor might be best remembered for one historic round against Julio Cesar Chavez, but he was much more than that.

"The Kid" was something of a child prodigy, winning a gold medal as a 17-year-old at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. He reportedly finished his amateur career with a record of 99-4. And his otherworldly speed and combination punching made him a dazzling professional, at least throughout the 1980s, under the tutelage of George Benton and Lou Duva. He won major titles in two divisions.

"I reached the pinnacle of amateur boxing, winning a gold medal. That is the ultimate thing to do," Taylor told THE RING.

Taylor embarked on his pro career on November 15, 1984, making his debut with fellow U.S. Olympians Evander Holyfield, Mark Breland, Pernell Whitaker, Tyrell Biggs and Virgil Hill at Madison Square Garden.

The Philadelphian won all but one of his first 20 bouts – the only blemish being a draw against 1976 Olympic champion Howard Davis Jr. – before he met the talented Buddy McGirt. Taylor gave a boxing clinic before adding an exclamation point, a final-round stoppage to win the IBF junior welterweight crown.

Taylor considers the McGirt victory to be the best of his career.

"I trained very hard for that fight and everything I worked on came together – the combinations, jab, foot movement – for me to win my first belt," he said. "I put up a performance because everyone thought he was gonna knock me out."

Then, after two successful defenses, came Mexican icon Julio Cesar Chavez on March 17, 1990.

Taylor displayed his considerable skills and seemed to be on his way to a career-defining victory, although

a determined Chavez inflicted more and more punishment as the fight went on.

Taylor had wide leads on two of the three scorecards going into the final round, meaning all he had to do was get to the final bell to have his hand raised. He didn't. With the final seconds ticking down, Chavez dropped Taylor. He got to his feet but referee Richard Steele, unconvinced that Taylor could continue, stopped the fight.

Two seconds were remaining.

It's still something that frustrates Taylor, more than a quarter century later.

"My cornermen (were) telling me I need the last round," Taylor said. "They should have told me to box and stay away. So I thought I needed the last round to win the fight. That's why I fought. It was a bad decision. And if it hadn't been for the referee … there was only two seconds left."

Taylor was never really the same after his first fight with Chavez, which was THE RING Magazine's Fight of the Year in 1990. Taylor sustained a broken orbital bone and had kidney damage, although he has his doubts that those injuries came from Chavez's fists alone.

"My face swelled up fast; I never swelled up before," he said. "How come it did in that fight? He didn't catch me a lot in the early rounds. I don't bruise easy. I think they padded his gloves. I truly believe that."

Taylor recounts his version of what happened that night in an autobiography entitled "Two Seconds from Glory."

Kathy Duva of Main Events, which promoted Taylor for his most of career, said the first thing she thinks of when Taylor's name is mentioned is the loss to Chavez in their first fight.

"I tell people all the time it's the most heartbreaking loss in the history of sports, and I dare anyone to come up with a more heartbreaking one," she said. "He was ahead after 11 rounds, and he was standing on his feet, and there were two seconds left in the fight, and for no reason the referee stopped it.

"Taking that win away from him that he earned broke his heart. I don't think he was ever the same again. It was so unfair to have that taken from him."

Taylor would step up to welterweight and win the WBA strap two fights later against then-undefeated Aaron Davis but, as Duva suggested, something was permanently gone after the Chavez setback.

Taylor took a risk by taking on junior middleweight star Terry Norris and was stopped in four rounds. He then dropped back down to 147, at which he lost his title to Crisanto Espana on the Lennox Lewis-Razor Ruddock card in 1992.

He fought Chavez again in 1994 but, a different fighter by this time, he was stopped in eight rounds. He finally hung up his gloves up in 2002, finishing his career with a record of 38-8-1 (20 knockouts).

Looking back, Taylor wishes he had started out at a lower weight.

"I wish I could have fought two more divisions before," he said. "I wish I had fought at featherweight and lightweight and won a belt. I moved up too fast. I'd have liked to be a four-weight world champion."

Today, Taylor, who turned 50 on Oct. 19, still lives and works as a minister in his hometown of Philadelphia. He isn't married but has four children.

Taylor kindly agreed to discuss the best fighters he fought in his career in 10 categories.

BEST JAB

Aaron Davis: Because he had a height and reach advantage. It was more of a weapon for him.

BEST DEFENSE

Terry Norris: Because of his foot movement, he was more up on his toes. He had good movement.

BEST CHIN

Julio Cesar Chavez: I hit him with shots and he didn't blink too much. I hit him with some good shots.

BEST PUNCHER

Chavez: I guess the way he puts his punches together. He got his body behind the punches.

FASTEST HANDS

Norris: Again, he boxed on his toes and was similar to my style. Nobody was as fast as me.

FASTEST FEET

Norris: He fought on his toes, he was in and out – he's in, he's out.

SMARTEST

Chavez: I'd say because he conserved himself; he didn't rush his punches, he took his time. He was behind but he kept his composure.

STRONGEST

Norris: Chavez didn't push me back too much. I would say Norris because of his punching power and because I was a natural junior welterweight and he was a junior middleweight.

BEST SKILLS

Chavez: I would say Chavez. His punching power, his durability, his accuracy.

BEST OVERALL

Chavez: I think Chavez. He was a (three-division) world champion before I fought him. He (was) undefeated; he beat everyone. I had to think more, I had to be in better shape and be sharper.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

Manny Pacquiao still has what it takes to end fight night with a celebration.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

MANNY PACQUIAO'S PRIME MOTIVATION THESE DAYS IS DOLLARS AND HE'S STILL GOOD ENOUGH TO COLLECT PLENTY OF THEM

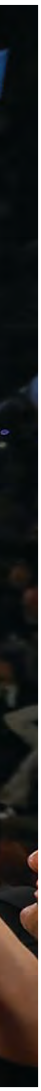
For years, Manny Pacquiao chased after Floyd Mayweather Jr. He wasn't just pursuing Mayweather. He was also following in his footsteps.

For years, Pacquiao wanted "Money." Now it feels like he just wants money.

Pacquiao's pay-per-views used to be events, a chance to see how he would overcome his latest obstacle. The fights he's taking are no longer adding to his legacy. They're padding his bank account. That's why he took on Jessie Vargas this November instead of Terence Crawford. "All work is easy work," Mayweather used to say. Vargas was barely work at all for Pacquiao.

He fought in spurts against Vargas, throwing 409 punches, landing 147, about 12 per round. He'd never thrown so few in a 12-round fight. He sent out slightly more than that against Mayweather, 429 shots while fighting with an injured shoulder and against an elusive target. It's apparently part of a pattern: Pacquiao let his hands go just 439 times in his rubber match with Tim Bradley earlier in 2016.

Gone is the prime Pacquiao of 2009 who knocked out Ricky Hatton with one punch and broke down Miguel Cotto with the accumulation of 336 fast, powerful shots. Pacquiao doesn't overwhelm his opponents with offense like he used to. Instead of picking them



MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

apart, he's picking his spots. He's still winning fights easily, but he's winning them boringly.

He can get away with it. There's nothing, and no one, forcing him to do otherwise.

He has long been a superstar, after all. Pacquiao doesn't need to build a legacy anymore, not when he's been the lineal champion in four weight classes and captured belts in another four, when he's gone 21-5-2 against world titleholders and 20-3-2 in title fights, and when he long ago established his credentials not only as a future Hall of Fame inductee but also as one of the best fighters ever.

He doesn't need to earn big fights anymore. He and Mayweather were already in negotiations back at the end of 2009, following the victories over Hatton and Cotto. Then he added dominating decisions over Joshua Clottey and Antonio Margarito in 2010, followed by a clear victory over Shane Mosley and another narrow one over Juan Manuel Marquez in 2011. When Floyd and Manny finally faced off in 2015, it was sold more by virtue of what they once were rather than who they remained.

They were, even at their advanced age and diminished form, still the two biggest stars and the two best welterweights. Now Floyd has retired, and Manny is the big fight that others want. Yet he doesn't have to take on a challenge that is too challenging.

If he faces the highly talented and incredibly difficult Crawford, it will be because that is the most viable option for Pacquiao's next pay-per-view, because Mayweather will have remained retired, because there are no other contenders in Top Rank's stable at welterweight or junior welterweight, because Golden Boy's 147-pounders are not yet ready, and because Al Haymon has other plans for his deep pool of talent in the division.

No matter whom Pacquiao faces, there is a dedicated faithful that is willing to pay to see him. They shelled out to see Pacquiao face Bradley for a third time this past April after beating him decisively two years before and also, in the eyes of many, when Bradley picked up the controversial nod in their first fight in 2012. And they paid for tickets and the pay-per-view telecast to watch Pacquiao face Vargas. It was an aging legend against a young upstart, but it was also Pacquiao going from beating Bradley to beating a guy whom Bradley already beat.

Fans paid up even though a much more competitive fight on paper was due to take place in the same city and on pay-per-view just two weeks later. Sergey Kovalev vs. Andre Ward was expected to be a battle of the two top light heavyweights and two of the best fighters in the world, an interesting clash of styles between the heavy-handed hitter and the brilliantly skilled boxer.

The Vargas fight's buy rate was smaller than in Pacquiao's glory days. His purses aren't what they once were. Neither is he. Yet what he is, and what he gets, is still enough. He's still earning victories. He's still earning paychecks.

That is the upside of his comeback. Usually boxers come out of retirement because they cannot adjust to life without training and fighting, and because they need money. Pacquiao is the same. He hung up his gloves after beating Bradley so that he could focus on running for the Senate in the Philippines and then fulfilling the duties of his office. But he missed the sport that had saved his life, improved it and then consumed it. Nor did it hurt that he could still get paid millions, even if the number of zeroes is fewer than it once was, to finance his lifestyle and support a country that has latched onto him as a hero pugilist and philanthropist.

It's no good for him or them, then, for Pacquiao to get hurt. He won't run into shots like he did against Marquez. He doesn't want the give and take. He doesn't even need to give that much.

Pacquiao remains one of the best even though he is no longer at his best. Despite his selective offense against Vargas, Pacquiao still landed half of his power shots, giving Vargas an education in what a higher class is like.

To be fair, he also easily did much more in 2016 than any of the other name welterweights.

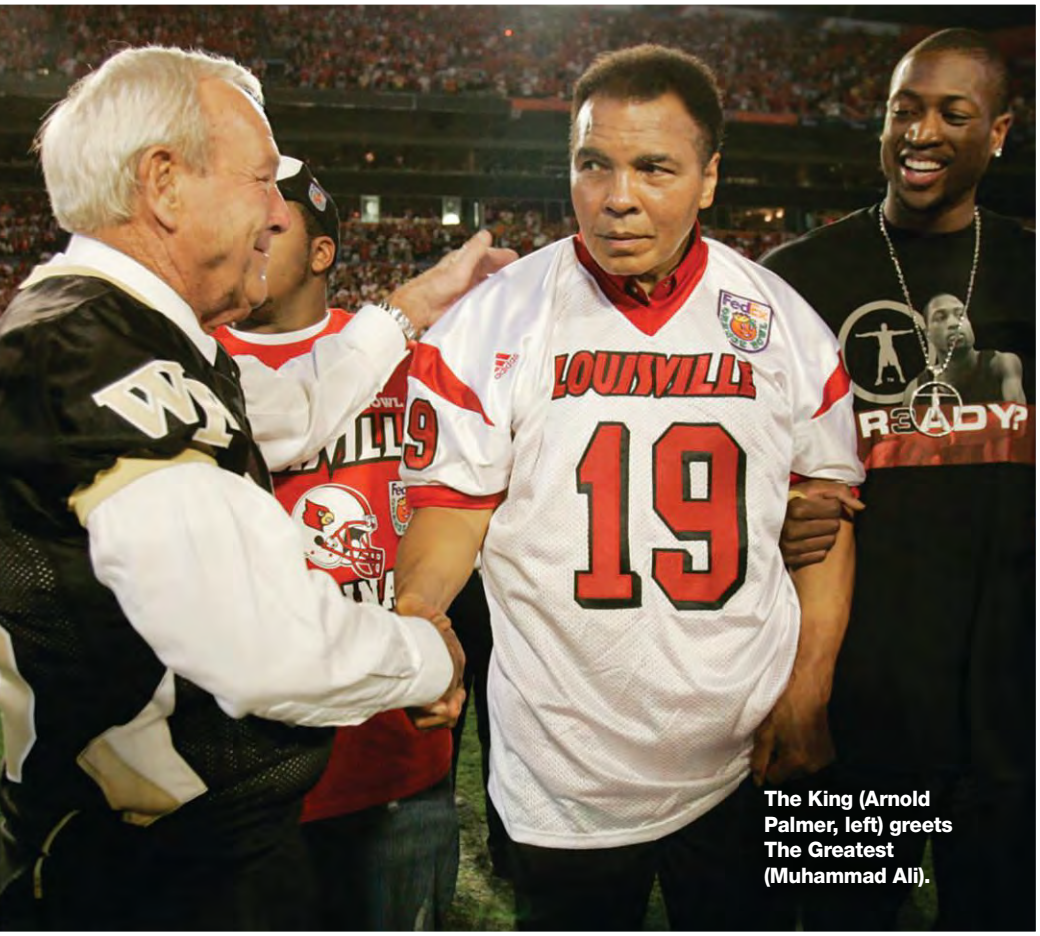
The second best year was turned in by Keith Thurman, who fought just once, topping Shawn Porter. Danny Garcia took on a Robert Guerrero who wasn't what he used to be and a Samuel Vargas who never was going to be. Errol Spence made short work of Chris Algieri and Leonard Bundu, neither of whom had done a thing of note at 147. Kell Brook only had one bout in the division, against an outmatched Kevin Bizier.

Had any of those other names put together the year Pacquiao did, we would be singing their praises. Bradley remains highly regarded. Vargas was a legit Top 10 welterweight, even if his resume was otherwise thin. But instead we want more because we hold Pacquiao, as we did Mayweather, to a much higher standard. He is a victim of his own success and stature.

Those who get to the highest of levels are asked to not waste their time, or perhaps rather our time and our money. We want to be excited, whether it is by them taking on the toughest of tasks or by them taking out those who cannot compete. We want them to stop coasting, to quit playing with their food and instead chew their foes up and spit them out.

No matter what we want him to do, that's not what Pacquiao can do anymore at 37 years old, 38 in December. No matter what we want him to do, that's not what he needs to do anymore at 59-6-2 (38 knockouts).

He can get away with it. His skills are still paying the bills – at the expense of thrills. RING



The King (Arnold Palmer, left) greets The Greatest (Muhammad Ali).

WHEN ARNOLD PALMER MET MUHAMMAD ALI

THE FAMOUS GOLFER DIDN'T LIKE THE FAMOUS BOXER – UNTIL THEIR FIRST MEETING

All great athletes are physically gifted, work hard at their craft and are fierce competitors. But great athletes are not necessarily great sportsmen. Arnold Palmer, who died on September 25 at age 87, was both.

Palmer was one of the greatest golfers of all time. More significantly, he brought golf to the masses. And with sports agent Mark McCormack, he redefined the economics of sports.

Before Palmer, off-the-field income for an athlete generally meant opening a steakhouse in his home town. If an athlete landed a footwear endorsement, he might be paid $500 and receive a dozen pairs of shoes. McCormack sold corporate America on the idea that companies could build product brands around Palmer as a symbol of excellence. For 30 consecutive years (1961 through 1990), Arnold was the highest-grossing athlete in the world in endorsement income.

I met Palmer in December 1992 when I was asked by his representatives at IMG whether I wanted to write a book about him. I'd previously authored "Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times," which was on the New York Times bestseller list and had led to a flurry of offers from other athletes.

Palmer was special. I wanted to tell his story.

Arnold was "everyman" in an elitist sport. From corporate boardrooms to the steel towns of Pennsylvania, people saw what they wanted to see in him.

As I wrote in the preface to "Arnold Palmer: A Personal

AP

Journey," "Palmer epitomizes The American Dream and mirrors what Americans like to think of themselves. He's bold, charismatic, a bit impatient, a winner; a man who identifies with his home town, has been married to the same woman for 39 years, succeeds at everything he has ever done, and still seems like a regular guy. Palmer is every mother's loving son and every man's best friend. He's the boy next door with the all-American smile, confident but not arrogant, reassuring and fun."

"In the early 1960s," I continued, "Palmer seemed to blend with images of John F. Kennedy, excitement, and youth. Then the decade turned violent. America was torn apart by political assassinations, urban riots, and Vietnam. But 'Arnie' remained 'Arnie' and resisted the tide. Athletes like Bill Russell, Jim Brown, and Arthur Ashe challenged what they believed was wrong with the prevailing American orthodoxy. Palmer continued to personify everything that he and middle America thought was right. At a time when Muhammad Ali refused induction into the United States Army, and John Carlos and Tommie Smith marked the 1968 Olympics with upraised fists, Palmer continued to evoke images of America the way Dwight Eisenhower, Norman Rockwell and John Wayne wanted it to be. And the qualities that led millions of people to think of him as 'The Quintessential American' endure to this day. Very few athletes hold onto their humility when they become great and retain their magic when they grow old. Palmer has done both."

Arthur Klebanoff was the head of IMG's literary agency in the early 1990s.

"I should warn you," Klebanoff told me before my first meeting with Palmer. "Arnold can't stand Muhammad Ali."

Palmer hadn't met Ali at the time, although they shared many traits. Each man had been an elite athlete who transformed his sport. Each man was remarkably charismatic. Arnold, like Muhammad, was a people person. I couldn't have imagined Arnold being rude to a waiter, a cab driver or fan.

But Palmer had issues of principle with Ali. Arnold had served in the United States Coast Guard from 1950 to 1953 and didn't like Muhammad's refusal to be inducted into the United States Army. He was also at odds with the segregationalist teachings of the Nation of Islam, which Ali adhered to in the 1960s.

But what aggravated Palmer most about Ali was Muhammad's mouth as it related to the field of play. Ali's bragging about how great he was and the way he demeaned some of his opponents offended Arnold's sense of sportsmanship.

Fast forward to June 1993. The Smithsonian Institution was honoring five great athletes who'd helped shape America: Ali, Palmer, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Chris Evert and Ted Williams. The celebration extended over a long weekend and included a White House reception, formal dinner and an awards ceremony attended by Bill Clinton.

Palmer was an accomplished pilot and fascinated by aviation. He'd taken his first flying lesson in 1956 and began soloing two years later. On the Saturday afternoon that we were in Washington, D.C., for the Smithsonian celebration, Arnold asked whether I'd like to visit the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum with him.

There was no entourage. Just the two of us. We walked into the museum like any other visitors. Most of our conversation that afternoon revolved around aviation. Among its many treasures, the museum houses the Wright Flyer from Wilbur and Orville Wright's 1903 flight at Kitty Hawk; the Spirit of St. Louis, which Charles Lindbergh flew in the first solo trans-Atlantic crossing in 1927; and the command module Columbia from the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing.

I asked Palmer, if he could have been part of any one of those three missions, which would he choose? His answer surprised me. Given Arnold's swashbuckling nature, I thought he'd opt for Lindbergh's solo flight. Instead, he told me, "Definitely, the moon landing. The technology behind it fascinates me."

We also talked about Ali. Arnold was particularly interested in knowing whether Muhammad's Parkinson's syndrome affected his cognitive abilities. I assured him that, at the time, there were no intellectual deficits. When we got back to the hotel, Palmer told me that he'd like to meet Ali. I made the introduction. They chatted briefly and were together again later that day in a meeting with Bill Clinton at the White House.

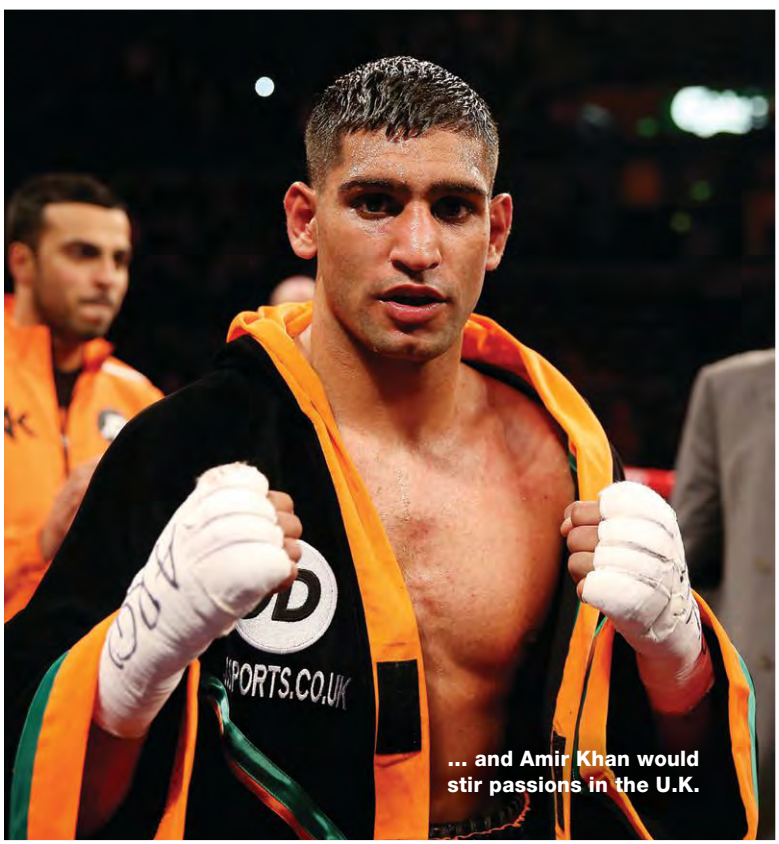
"Muhammad Ali seems like a nice man," Arnold told me afterward. "I like him."

Arnold Palmer loved his life. And he loved being Arnold Palmer. With the possible exception of Babe Ruth, no athlete ever did as much for a sport as Palmer did for golf. He had a reverence for the game, a remarkable camaraderie with his fellow golfers and a generous spirit toward the public. He was the perfect representative for golf in his time.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published recently by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

A welterweight matchup between Kell Brook ...

KELL BROOK VS. AMIR KHAN


... and Amir Khan would stir passions in the U.K.

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Kell Brook and Amir Khan are neighbors but certainly not friends.

A bad-blood bout between the two leading British welterweights, therefore, seemed like a natural. But early talks were poisonous and inflamed egos, as well as a new weight disparity, might've killed off what is arguably the most lucrative fight available on U.K. soil.

Initially Khan, a former unified titleholder at junior welterweight, claimed that Brook was not on his level. That all changed when Brook ventured to California and made a serious statement by dethroning then-unbeaten IBF titleholder Shawn Porter in August 2014.

Surely Khan and Brook would get together at a soccer stadium for all the marbles? Forget it. Khan blew hot and cold and Brook indulged in a succession of forgettable title defenses before both fighters made the foolhardy decision to move to middleweight earlier this year.

Khan annoyed Canelo Alvarez for five rounds with some innocuous raids before being nailed to the canvas in the sixth round of a 155-pound catchweight contest. Brook fought at full middleweight against Gennady Golovkin and received a broken orbital bone and a fifth-round stoppage loss.

Now they need each other, right? Not quite.

Brook was expected to drop back to junior middleweight, so needless to say Khan announced in late October that he would face the Sheffield man at welterweight. Brook, who still holds the IBF 147-pound title, surprisingly agreed but soon both men were targeting Manny Pacquiao after he defeated Jessie Vargas.

Odds are that Brook and Khan will continue to find reasons not to face each other in 2017. THE RING discussed with three boxing experts what would transpire in the elusive all-British matchup if it did happen.

BROOK ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ KHAN

147 POUNDS

BROOK		KHAN
30	AGE	29
36-1 (25 KOS)	RECORD	31-4 (19 KOS)
67.6	KO PERCENTAGE	54.3
ORTHODOX	STANCE	ORTHODOX
5 FEET 9 INCHES (175 CM)	HEIGHT	5 FEET 8½ INCHES (174 CM)
69 INCHES (175 CM)	REACH	71 INCHES (180 CM)

FIGHTER

RICKY BURNS

WBA junior welterweight titleholder

It's a really close fight, a 50-50 fight because both of them are world class. If Khan is on form, then his boxing ability and his speed are unbelievable, but the problem is that he has to keep that up for 12 rounds. I told anyone who would listen that Khan would be leading Canelo before one punch ended the fight, and that's exactly what happened. Brook doesn't have Canelo's power, but he still hits very hard for a welterweight, and I think he'd find the shot to finish it. I actually see an almost identical fight to the one with Canelo. Khan gets off to a great start using his speed to frustrate Brook but, somewhere after the halfway point, he gets caught by a bomb.

PREDICTION: Brook

TRAINER

STEVE MAYLETT

Trainer of Terry Flanagan

Kell Brook is very accurate, and every shot he throws is spiteful. When we've been over there (to Sheffield) for sparring with Terry (Flanagan), it's like you feel every single shot. Obviously Amir hasn't got the best chin either, so at some point Brook is going to catch him and hurt him. I'll be honest, if Amir had a chin, I believe he'd be the best fighter on the planet. He'd be so hard to beat. I'm a big fan of both of them, but I think Amir would be running away all night, and even though he's won decisions by doing that in the past, I think at some point Kell would take him out. I've noticed that when Khan gets hurt or dropped, he's usually midway through a combination. His trainers are obviously working on getting him to move or block, and it must be really frustrating when it happens. He's a risk-taker, and that's why he sells tickets. But I think Brook stops him in the mid-rounds.

PREDICTION: Brook

MEDIA

STEVE LILLIS

BoxNation analyst

I've always felt that Khan would be able to use his hand speed to deal with Brook. If Amir gets caught clean, then we all know what could happen. But if he avoids the big punch, then I think he wins on points. If Amir boxes off the back foot and moves, then he has the smarts to win this fight. Despite anything he might say to the contrary, Khan is not a strong welterweight, and we haven't really seen him knock anyone out since his junior welterweight days. Even then, speed was his biggest asset. It could be a dull fight, but that's what I see happening. I've always fancied Khan to beat Brook, and I'm not going to change my mind based on what happened when they stepped up to middleweight. You're as good as your last fight, and both of them got battered. Khan-Brook is not a fight I can predict with any real conviction, but I've always gone for Khan's speed. This is if the fight takes place at welterweight. The higher up the scale you go, the odds favor Brook, and I'll be shocked if he ever makes 147 pounds again.

PREDICTION: Khan

Boxing in New York is at a crossroads.

STATE OF SHOCK

If you still thought some relationships were just too sacred to end, try this on: Boxing and New York are drifting apart.

In late October, New York promoter **Lou DiBella** canceled all the shows he had booked in-state for the remainder of 2016, including a big one at Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Fellow promoter **Joe DeGuardia** had already taken similar action. They had no choice because of new legislation increasing insurance requirements for anyone planning to stage a combat sports card in The Empire State.

The serpentine politics behind the law were meticulously documented by **Thomas Hauser** on RingTV.com (http://bit.do/turmoil-at-nysac). The real-world consequence was that each fighter had to have general medical coverage and death benefits in the amount of $50,000, up from $10,000. That in itself wasn't an outlandish rule. The deal-breaker was a second requirement: a $1 million policy for each fighter to cover traumatic brain injuries. For top-tier promoters like **Bob Arum** or multi-billion dollar organizations like the UFC (which was officially legalized in New York in April and is accused by some of backing the legislation), that number is big but manageable, at least on a limited basis. For lifeblood promoters like DiBella and DeGuardia, the absence of an affordable policy – which insurers haven't provided so far – means lights out in the clubs.

DiBella has dates booked for January 2017 and is hopeful things will be resolved by then. But September, according to a statement from his company, was the first calendar month without a New York pro boxing event in more than 11 years, and the drought has continued. Barclays has been without a bell since July. UFC 205, meanwhile, did gangbusters at Madison Square Garden on November 12.

The real casualties, though, are the boxers. **Heather Hardy**, who is as New Yorky as a New York fighter can be and sells the tickets to prove it, was quoted in the statement, "I don't know how I'm going to survive at all, let alone the upcoming holiday season. I'm going to have to go back to delivering books and answering phones to try to cover the bills."

So what's a fighter to do? Hardy announced in mid-November that she'd signed with an MMA promoter and will enter the octagon in January.

But really, for the sake of the children, thank goodness New York has taken a firm stance on boxing and is supporting more gentle sports, like football. A story emerged at the end of October that the Giants had almost hired Alabama mastermind **Nick Saban** as head coach last January (they went with **Ben McAdoo** instead). And the middleman for that near-consummation? Bob Arum!

With an accomplice and a getaway driver already behind bars, the man said to be the actual shooter in the 2009 murder of **Vernon Forrest** was convicted and sentenced to life in prison on October 24. The two-division champion was shot several times in the back after he chased one of the three men who robbed him at a gas station in Atlanta.

Arnulfo Obando, the longtime trainer of No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter **Roman Gonzalez**, died on November 10 in Nicaragua. Obando, 54, was kept alive on a ventilator for over a week after a severe stroke but later suffered a fatal heart attack.

In Florida, a 16-year-old Muslim girl was disqualified from an amateur bout for wearing her traditional head covering. **Amaiya Zafar**, who lives in Minnesota, made news in 2015 for her efforts to change the AIBA rules, which consider the hijab, long sleeves and leggings to be safety hazards, but a lack of opponents kept her from directly challenging them. The disqualification, after which Zafar's opponent insisted on sharing the belt with her, could open the door for action from civil rights groups.

In Louisville, Kentucky, a man apparently just walked into the **Muhammad Ali Center** on the afternoon of October 22, plucked a signed portrait of Ali off the wall and walked out. Police have so far been unable to recover the print, by late artist **LeRoy Neiman**, or locate a suspect recorded by surveillance cameras.

At least he actually *is* on camera, though. In what his own defense lawyer described as a "spectacularly inept" attempt at blackmail, a 27-year-old man named **Hamza Din** contacted **Amir Khan's** team to say he had a sex tape featuring the fighter and "a girl" in a hotel room and would make it public unless they paid up. A price was never specified, but Mr. Din, using an account under the name "Harry Dean," was clear in his email that the footage was "100 per cent real." It was 100 percent nonexistent, in fact, and the plot quickly fell apart. After Din's conviction, Khan asked that he be given treatment instead of jail time.

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FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

ANDRE WARD

By **Michael Rosenthal**

Victorious Andre Ward gave a gutsy performance against Sergey Kovalev. No one would argue with that.

Some will object to the choice of Andre Ward as Fighter of the Month.

They believe passionately that Ward was awarded a gift decision over Sergey Kovalev in the matchup of the year on Nov. 19 in Las Vegas, a result that gave Ward three light heavyweight titles and ignited a full-blown controversy.

These are the facts, though: Ward is the new IBF, WBA and WBO titleholder after his tight decision (114-113 on all cards) and he deserves respect for a rousing comeback even if you scored it for Kovalev.

Ward was in big trouble in the second round, when he went down from a right counter. He got up and smiled but it was no laughing matter. He needed to change something or else.

And he did. He started to duck under Kovalev's jab or smother him inside, which made it more difficult for the powerful Russian to land. That subtly changed the fight, allowing Ward to at least match Kovalev punch for punch from the outside and – from my perspective – outwork him inside.

Two of the judges gave Ward each of the final six rounds, which many critics point to as a red flag given that the fight was competitive throughout. At the same time, I believe – I hope – most will agree that Ward used all his guile and resilience to come on strongly in the latter half of the fight.

Ward didn't deliver a great performance, as some expected him to do, but it was a strong one given the opponent and the stakes.

POUND FOR POUND: Andre Ward (No. 4 last month) had the pinnacle within reach but the inconclusive (in the eyes of many) nature of his win over Sergey Kovalev (No. 2 last month) kept him from displacing No. 1 Roman Gonzalez. Ward went to No. 2, Kovalev dropped to No. 3 and Gennady Golovkin was pushed from No. 3 to No. 4.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No. 1 Grigory Drozd was removed for inactivity, his career derailed and potentially ended by injury. As a result, Denis Lebedev inherited his spot and everyone was elevated a rank, creating an empty seat for undefeated Russian Murat Gassiev at No. 10.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Ward's razor-thin decision win over Kovalev (No. 1 last month) earned him the No. 1 spot and a trio of belts; Kovalev dropped to No. 2. Isaac Chilemba (No. 6 last month) dropped to No. 10 after losing by eighth-round TKO to Ukrainian Olympian Oleksandr Gvozdyk (unrated), who entered at No. 9.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Felix Sturm (No. 9 last month) was dumped after his "B" sample from a February drug test came up positive for a banned steroid. After Chudinov (No. 10 last month) moved into Sturm's old digs, Germany's Tyron Zeuge arrived at No. 10.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Jarrett Hurd continued his very promising rise and cracked the ratings at No. 10 with a sixth-round stoppage of longtime contender Jo Jo Dan (unrated). Hurd replaced Vanes Martirosyan.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Manny Pacquiao returned to the ring with a title-winning unanimous decision over Jessie Vargas (No. 8 last month) in Las Vegas. Vargas dropped to No. 9 and Pacquiao came in just below Shawn Porter (No. 4 last month). Pacquiao's arrival also triggered a reevaluation of Amir Khan's place in the picture. Ultimately Porter rose to No. 3, Pacquiao took the No. 4 spot and Khan was lowered from No. 3 to No. 6. Frankie Gomez (No. 10) was knocked out in the shuffle.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: A pretty solid Kiryl Relikh (unrated) lost for the first time at the hands of Ricky Burns, who climbed from No. 8 to No. 7. Lucas Matthysse (No. 2 last month) was removed after a year of inactivity and former U.S. Olympian Jose Ramirez came in at No. 10.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Jason Sosa followed up his stoppage of Javier Fortuna in June with a unanimous decision over Stephen Smith (unrated) and rose from No. 10 to No. 9.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Satoshi Hosono was replaced at No. 10 by undefeated Mexican Jorge Lara after dropping a split decision to Jonathan Barros (unrated).

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Jessie Magdaleno (No. 6 last month) took the WBO belt and a good chunk of pride from Nonito Donaire (No. 3 last month) with a unanimous nod from the judges; they switched places in the ratings.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Unrated Liborio Solis lost a unanimous decision to Jamie McDonnell (No. 1), but it was by no means a celebrated example of judging. In light of that, Solis was brought in at No. 10, replacing Pungluang Sor Singyu.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: After vacating his titles at flyweight in September, Juan Francisco Estrada settled in at No. 6 with a 10-round shutout of Raymond Tabugon (unrated).

FLYWEIGHTS: Brian Viloria (No. 4 last month) hasn't fought since his loss to Roman Gonzalez in October 2015 and was thus subject to mandatory removal. China's Zou Shiming blew out Prasitsak Phaprom on the cards to win his first title and was added to the list at No. 9.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Hekkie Budler (No. 4 strawweight last month) packed on three pounds (roughly two Chipotle burritos) and arrived at No. 8 after beating Siyabonga Siyo (unrated) by unanimous decision.

STRAWWEIGHTS: With Budler moving up, everybody previously below him got a promotion and South Africa's Simphiwe Khonco got the No. 10 slot. Jose Argumedo kept his belt and No. 4 ranking with a third-round TKO of Jose Jimenez, who fell off the list from No. 8. Japan's Ryuya Yamanaka took the resulting vacancy at No. 10. Having moved to No. 9 by this point, Khonco gained another spot after outpointing former titleholder Nkosinathi Joyi (unrated).

Oleksandr Gvozdyk (right) turned in a strong performance against Isaac Chilemba on the Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev card.

THE FIGURES UNDER THE FIGHTERS' NAMES INDICATE: WEEKS IN THE RATINGS • COUNTRY • RECORD

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C TYSON FURY
249 • U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO**
601 • Ukraine • 64-4-0 (53 KOs)
2. **DEONTAY WILDER**
157 • U.S. • 37-0-0 (36 KOs)
3. **KUBRAT PULEV**
267 • Bulgaria • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
4. **LUIS ORTIZ**
49 • Cuba • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)
5. **ANTHONY JOSHUA**
56 • U.K. • 17-0-0 (17 KOs)
6. **JOSEPH PARKER**
33 • New Zealand • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
7. **BERMANE STIVERNE**
187 • Canada • 25-2-1 (21 KOs)
8. **BRYANT JENNINGS**
140 • U.S. • 19-2-0 (10 KOs)
9. **DAVID HAYE**
28 • U.K. • 28-2-0 (26 KOs)
10. **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
25 • Mexico • 29-0-0 (19 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **DENIS LEBEDEV**
356 • Russia • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
2. **OLEKSANDR USYK**
60 • Ukraine • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)
3. **TONY BELLEW**
27 • U.K. • 28-2-1 (18 KOs)
4. **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
67 • Poland • 26-1-0 (16 KOs)
5. **MARCO HUCK**
246 • Germany • 40-3-1 (27 KOs)
6. **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
39 • Latvia • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
7. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
212 • Germany • 38-8-2 (23 KOs)
8. **ILUNGA MAKABU**
176 • Congo • 19-2-0 (18 KOs)
9. **YUNIER DORTICOS**
27 • Cuba • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
10. **MURAT GASSIEV**
2 • Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **ANDRE WARD**
35 • U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
2. **SERGEY KOVALEV**
201 • Russia • 30-1-1 (26 KOs)
3. **ADONIS STEVENSON**
181 • Canada • 28-1-0 (23 KOs)
4. **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
141 • Colombia • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
5. **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
102 • Russia • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)
6. **VYACHESLAV SHABRANSKYY**
49 • Ukraine • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
7. **JOE SMITH JR.**
23 • U.S. • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
8. **NATHAN CLEVERLY**
8 • U.K. • 30-3-0 (16 KOs)
9. **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
1 • Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
10. **ISAAC CHILEMBA**
239 • Malawi • 24-5-2 (10 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **JAMES DEGALE**
181 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (14 KOs)
2. **BADOU JACK**
83 • Sweden • 20-1-2 (12 KOs)
3. **GILBERTO RAMIREZ**
124 • Mexico • 34-0-0 (24 KOs)
4. **GEORGE GROVES**
259 • U.K. • 25-3-0 (18 KOs)
5. **ANDRE DIRRELL**
117 • U.S. • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
6. **CALLUM SMITH**
77 • U.K. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
7. **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
119 • U.S. • 29-1-1 (23 KOs)
8. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
372 • Armenia • 45-5-0 (30 KOs)
9. **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
81 • Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
10. **TYRON ZEUGE**
2 • Germany • 19-0-1 (11 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C CANELO ALVAREZ
53 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

1. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
259 • Kaz. • 36-0-0 (33 KOs)

2. DANIEL JACOBS
102 • U.S. • 32-1-0 (29 KOs)

3. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
104 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (12 KOs)

4. DAVID LEMIEUX
78 • Canada • 36-3-0 (32 KOs)

5. ANDY LEE
102 • Ireland • 34-3-1 (24 KOs)

6. CHRIS EUBANK JR.
85 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)

7. PETER QUILLIN
234 • U.S. • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)

8. HASSAN N'DAM
149 • Cameroon • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)

9. AVTANDIL KHURTSIDZE
38 • Georgia • 32-2-2 (21 KOs)

10. MACIEJ SULECKI
21 • Poland • 23-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. CANELO ALVAREZ
10 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

2. ERISLANDY LARA
282 • Cuba • 23-2-2 (13 KOs)

3. JERMALL CHARLO
128 • U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)

4. MIGUEL COTTO
53 • P.R. • 40-5-0 (33 KOs)

5. JERMELL CHARLO
159 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

6. DEMETRIUS ANDRADE
58 • U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

7. AUSTIN TROUT
234 • U.S. • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)

8. JULIAN WILLIAMS
102 • U.S. • 22-0-1 (14 KOs)

9. LIAM SMITH
63 • U.K. • 23-1-1 (13 KOs)

10. JARRETT HURD
2 • U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KELL BROOK
292 • U.K. • 36-1-0 (25 KOs)

2. KEITH THURMAN
194 • U.S. • 27-0-0 (22 KOs)

3. SHAWN PORTER
155 • U.S. • 26-2-1 (16 KOs)

4. MANNY PACQUIAO
3 • Phil. • 59-6-2 (38 KOs)

5. TIM BRADLEY
233 • U.S. • 33-2-1 (13 KOs)

6. AMIR KHAN
134 • U.K. • 31-4-0 (19 KOs)

7. DANNY GARCIA
69 • U.S. • 33-0-0 (19 KOs)

8. ERROL SPENCE
60 • U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)

9. JESSIE VARGAS
38 • U.S. • 27-2-0 (10 KOs)

10. KONSTANTIN PONOMAREV
33 • Ukraine • 30-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C TERENCE CRAWFORD
84 • U.S. • 29-0-0 (20 KOs)

1. VIKTOR POSTOL
171 • Ukraine • 28-1-0 (12 KOs)

2. ADRIEN BRONER
134 • U.S. • 32-2-0 (24 KOs)

3. ANTONIO OROZCO
60 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)

4. EDUARD TROYANOVSKY
52 • Russia • 25-0-0 (22 KOs)

5. ADRIAN GRANADOS
38 • U.S. • 18-4-2 (12 KOs)

6. RICKY BURNS
26 • U.K. • 41-5-1 (14 KOs)

7. JACK CATTERALL
35 • U.K. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

8. JOHN MOLINA
24 • U.S. • 29-6-0 (23 KOs)

9. REGIS PROGRAIS
18 • U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

10. JOSE RAMIREZ
1 • U.S. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C JORGE LINARES
142 • Venezuela • 41-3-0 (27 KOs)

1. DEJAN ZLATICANIN
85 • Montenegro • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

2. TERRY FLANAGAN
59 • U.K. • 31-0-0 (12 KOs)

3. ROBERT EASTER
34 • U.S. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)

4. ANTHONY CROLLA
57 • U.K. • 31-5-3 (13 KOs)

5. RICHARD COMMEY
78 • Ghana • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

6. SHARIF BOGERE
108 • Uganda • 29-1-0 (20 KOs)

7. DENIS SHAFIKOV
85 • Russia • 37-2-1 (20 KOs)

8. FELIX VERDEJO
32 • Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

9. PETR PETROV
9 • Russia • 38-4-2 (19 KOs)

10. MASON MENARD
9 • U.S. • 32-1-0 (24 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. FRANCISCO VARGAS
124 • Mexico • 23-0-2 (17 KOs)

2. ORLANDO SALIDO
114 • Mexico • 43-13-4 (30 KOs)

3. VASYL LOMACHENKO
24 • Ukraine • 6-1-0 (4 KOs)

4. TAKASHI MIURA
191 • Japan • 30-3-2 (23 KOs)

5. JEZREEL CORRALES
30 • Panama • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)

6. TAKASHI UCHIYAMA
360 • Japan • 24-1-1 (20 KOs)

7. JOSE PEDRAZA
97 • P.R. • 22-0-0 (12 KOs)

8. ROMAN MARTINEZ
429 • P.R. • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)

9. JASON SOSA
22 • U.S. • 20-1-4 (15 KOs)

10. SAUL RODRIGUEZ
53 • U.S. • 20-0-1 (15 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GARY RUSSELL JR.
87 • U.S. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)

2. CARL FRAMPTON
17 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

3. LEE SELBY
141 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)

4. LEO SANTA CRUZ
65 • U.S. • 32-1-1 (18 KOs)

5. ABNER MARES
186 • Mexico • 29-2-1 (15 KOs)

6. SIMPIWE VETYEKA
155 • S. Africa • 29-3-0 (17 KOs)

7. JESUS CUELLAR
111 • Argentina • 28-1-0 (21 KOs)

8. OSCAR VALDEZ
33 • Mexico • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)

9. JOSEPH DIAZ JR.
34 • U.S. • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

10. JORGE LARA
7 • Mexico • 28-0-2 (20 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
316 • Cuba • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

2. SCOTT QUIGG
209 • U.K. • 31-1-2 (23 KOs)

3. JESSIE MAGDALENO
76 • U.S. • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)

4. GENESIS SERVANIA
141 • Phil. • 28-0-0 (11 KOs)

5. REY VARGAS
102 • Mexico • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)

6. NONITO DONAIRE
87 • Phil. • 37-4-0 (24 KOs)

7. HOZUMI HASEGAWA
10 • Japan • 36-5-0 (16 KOs)

8. JONATHAN GUZMAN
18 • Dom. Rep. • 22-0-0 (22 KOs)

9. MOISES FLORES
20 • Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

10. DIEGO DE LA HOYA
17 • Mexico • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING'S Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his champion weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Records provided by boxrec.com

RATINGS

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
264 • Japan • 26-0-2 (18 KOs)

1. JAMIE MCDONNELL
186 • U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)

2. RAU'SHEE WARREN
22 • U.S. • 14-1-0 (4 KOs)

3. JUAN CARLOS PAYANO
113 • Dom. Rep. • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)

4. LEE HASKINS
76 • U.K. • 34-3-0 (14 KOs)

5. ANSELMO MORENO
452 • Panama • 36-5-1 (12 KOs)

6. MARLON TAPALES
49 • Phil. • 29-2-0 (12 KOs)

7. TOMOKI KAMEDA
173 • Japan • 32-2-0 (20 KOs)

8. ZOLANI TETE
37 • S. Africa • 24-3-0 (20 KOs)

9. LUIS NERY
17 • Mexico • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)

10. LIBORIO SOLIS
2 • Venezuela • 25-5-1 (11 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. NAOYA INOUE
99 • Japan • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

2. ROMAN GONZALEZ
11 • Nicaragua • 46-0-0 (38 KOs)

3. CARLOS CUADRAS
238 • Mexico • 35-1-1 (27 KOs)

4. SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
186 • Thailand • 41-4-1 (38 KOs)

5. LUIS CONCEPCION
62 • Panama • 35-4-0 (24 KOs)

6. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
7 • Mexico • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)

7. KHALID YAFAI
37 • U.K. • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

8. KOHEI KONO
58 • Japan • 32-9-1 (13 KOs)

9. JERWIN ANCAJAS
12 • Phil. • 25-1-1 (16 KOs)

10. MCJOE ARROYO
128 • P.R. • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KAZUTO IOKA
115 • Japan • 20-1-0 (12 KOs)

2. JOHNRIEL CASIMERO
59 • Phil. • 23-3-0 (15 KOs)

3. DONNIE NIETES
9 • Phil. • 39-1-4 (22 KOs)

4. MORUTI MTHALANE
134 • S. Africa • 32-2-0 (21 KOs)

5. AMNAT RUENROENG
126 • Thailand • 17-1-0 (5 KOs)

6. JUAN CARLOS REVECO
262 • Argentina • 36-3-0 (19 KOs)

7. MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
109 • P.R. • 16-3-0 (14 KOs)

8. NAWAPHON POR CHOKCHAI
67 • Thailand • 36-0-0 (28 KOs)

9. ZOU SHIMING
3 • China • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

10. DAIGO HIGA
8 • Japan • 11-0-0 (11 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. RYOICHI TAGUCHI
102 • Japan • 25-2-1 (11 KOs)

2. RANDY PETALCORIN
133 • Phil. • 24-2-1 (18 KOs)

3. PEDRO GUEVARA
191 • Mexico • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)

4. AKIRA YAEGASHI
47 • Japan • 24-5-0 (12 KOs)

5. JAVIER MENDOZA
85 • Mexico • 24-4-1 (19 KOs)

6. MILAN MELINDO
106 • Phil. • 34-2-0 (12 KOs)

7. GANIGAN LOPEZ
38 • Mexico • 28-6-0 (17 KOs)

8. HEKKIE BUDLER
5 • S. Africa • 30-2-0 (9 KOs)

9. REY LORETO
85 • Phil. • 23-13-0 (15 KOs)

10. MOISES FUENTES
32 • Mexico • 24-2-1 (13 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
284 • Thailand • 43-0-0 (17 KOs)

2. KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
112 • Thailand • 13-0-0 (6 KOs)

3. BYRON ROJAS
36 • Nicaragua • 18-3-3 (8 KOs)

4. JOSE ARGUMEDO
47 • Mexico • 19-3-1 (11 KOs)

5. KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA
191 • Japan • 31-8-0 (12 KOs)

6. CARLOS BUITRAGO
215 • Nicaragua • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)

7. RIKU KANO
26 • Japan • 10-2-1 (5 KOs)

8. SIMPHIWE KHONCO
5 • S. Africa • 17-5-0 (7 KOs)

9. SAUL JUAREZ
20 • Mexico • 23-5-1 (12 KOs)

10. RYUYA YAMANAKA
2 • Japan • 13-2-0 (3 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

1. ROMAN GONZALEZ
129 • Nicaragua • 46-0-0 (38 KOs)

2. ANDRE WARD
63 • U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

3. SERGEY KOVALEV
89 • Russia • 30-1-1 (26 KOs)

4. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
93 • Kazakhstan • 36-0-0 (33 KOs)

5. TERENCE CRAWFORD
82 • U.S. • 29-0-0 (20 KOs)

6. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
171 • Cuba • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

7. VASYL LOMACHENKO
24 • Ukraine • 6-1-0 (4 KO)

8. CANELO ALVAREZ
53 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

9. SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
80 • Japan • 26-0-2 (18 KOs)

10. CARL FRAMPTON
17 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

Andre Ward (left) moved up two spots on the list.

THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

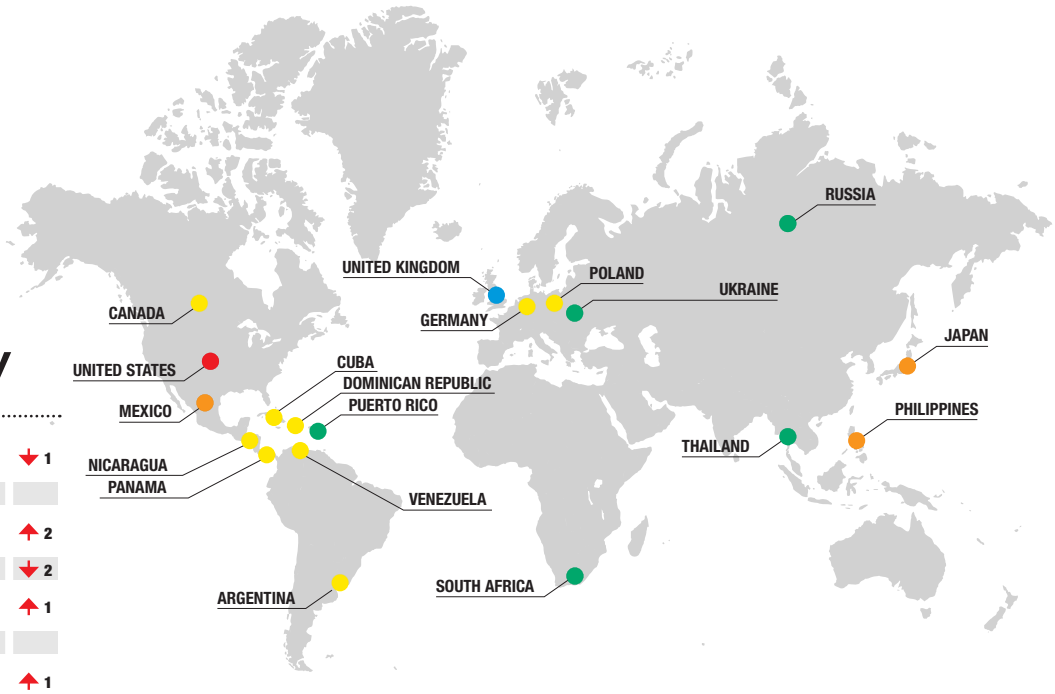
A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

RATED FIGHTERS BY COUNTRY

●	UNITED STATES	36	↓ 1
●	UNITED KINGDOM	23	
●	MEXICO	21	↑ 2
●	JAPAN	14	↓ 2
●	PHILIPPINES	10	↑ 1
●	RUSSIA	8	
●	UKRAINE	7	↑ 1
●	PUERTO RICO	6	
●	SOUTH AFRICA	5	↑ 1
●	THAILAND	5	↓ 1
●	CUBA	4	
●	CANADA	3	
●	GERMANY	3	↓ 1
●	NICARAGUA	3	
●	PANAMA	3	
●	ARGENTINA	2	↓ 1
●	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	2	
●	POLAND	2	
●	VENEZUELA	2	↑ 1
	ARMENIA	1	
	BULGARIA	1	
	CAMEROON	1	
	CHINA	1	↑ 1
	COLOMBIA	1	↓ 1
	CONGO	1	
	GEORGIA	1	
	GHANA	1	
	IRELAND	1	
	KAZAKHSTAN	1	
	LATVIA	1	
	MALAWI	1	
	MONTENEGRO	1	
	NEW ZEALAND	1	
	SWEDEN	1	
	UGANDA	1	

Countries out (from last month): *None*
Countries in: *China*



AMERICA VS. AMERICA

The Americas have 84 fighters in the ratings (83 if you count Canelo Alvarez only once), which is almost half of all rated fighters. Here, we break the Americas down to English- vs. Spanish-speaking countries. And it's close.

DIVISION	ENGLISH	SPANISH
HEAVYWEIGHTS	3	2
CRUISERWEIGHTS	0	1
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS	3	1
SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS	2	1
MIDDLEWEIGHTS	3	1
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS	6	3
WELTERWEIGHTS	6	0
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS	7	0
LIGHTWEIGHTS	2	2
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS	2	5
FEATHERWEIGHTS	3	4
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS	1	5
BANTAMWEIGHTS	1	4
JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS	0	5
FLYWEIGHTS	0	2
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS	0	4
STRAWWEIGHTS	0	4
TOTAL	39	44

Note: *Canelo Alvarez is included twice here because he is rated in two divisions.*

WELL REPRESENTED

The U.K. is led by Carl Frampton.

The U.S., the overall leader in number of fighters in the RING Ratings, doesn't lead all ratings-related categories. Here are the nations with at least one fighter in the most divisions:

13 ..... UNITED KINGDOM
12 ..... UNITED STATES
11 ..... MEXICO
7 ..... JAPAN
6 ..... PHILIPPINES
6 ..... UKRAINE
5 ..... PUERTO RICO
5 ..... RUSSIA
5 ..... SOUTH AFRICA
4 ..... CUBA
3 ..... CANADA
3 ..... PANAMA
3 ..... THAILAND

FOCUS ON . . .

HEAVYWEIGHTS

A breakdown of THE RING Top 10 in one division each month, plus a list of fighters on the cusp of breaking through. This month: the heavyweights.

Wladimir Klitschko has been in the heavyweight Top 10 for almost 12 years.

MOST WEEKS RATED: WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO **601**

FEWEST WEEKS RATED: ANDY RUIZ JR. **25**

OLDEST: KLITSCHKO **40**

YOUNGEST: JOSEPH PARKER **24**

MOST FIGHTS: KLITSCHKO **68**

FEWEST FIGHTS: ANTHONY JOSHUA **17**

HIGHEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: TYSON FURY, JOSHUA, LUIS ORTIZ, PARKER, RUIZ, DEONTAY WILDER **100 PERCENT**

LOWEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: BERMANE STIVERNE **89.3 PERCENT**

MOST KOS: KLITSCHKO **53**

FEWEST KOS: BRYANT JENNINGS **10**

LONGEST CURRENT WINNING STREAK: WILDER **37 FIGHTS**

ON THE POUND-FOR-POUND LIST: NONE

TITLEHOLDERS IN THE TOP 10: FURY (RING), JOSHUA (IBF), WILDER (WBC)

ON THE CUSP (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER): CHRISTIAN HAMMER, JARRELL MILLER, CARLOS TAKAM, IZUAGBE UGONOH, DILLIAN WHYTE

OLD SCHOOL 8

THE RING staff members' current champions in the original eight weight classes.

MICHAEL ROSENTHAL RING MAGAZINE EDITOR

HEAVYWEIGHT: TYSON FURY
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: ANDRE WARD
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: TERENCE CRAWFORD
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
BANTAMWEIGHT: ROMAN GONZALEZ
FLYWEIGHT: KAZUTO IOKA

DOUG FISCHER RINGTV.COM EDITOR

HEAVYWEIGHT: TYSON FURY
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: SERGEY KOVALEV
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: KEITH THURMAN
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: CARL FRAMPTON
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: KAZUTO IOKA

BRIAN HARTY RING MAGAZINE MANAGING EDITOR

HEAVYWEIGHT: TYSON FURY
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: SERGEY KOVALEV
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: TERENCE CRAWFORD
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: CARL FRAMPTON
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: DONNIE NIETES

MITCH ABRAMSON STAFF WRITER

HEAVYWEIGHT: DEONTAY WILDER
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: ANDRE WARD
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: KELL BROOK
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: CARL FRAMPTON
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: KAZUTO IOKA

Note: *This is how the weights break down: Heavyweight includes cruiserweight, light heavyweight includes super middleweight, all divisions middleweight through flyweight include the "junior" versions, and flyweight also includes strawweight.*

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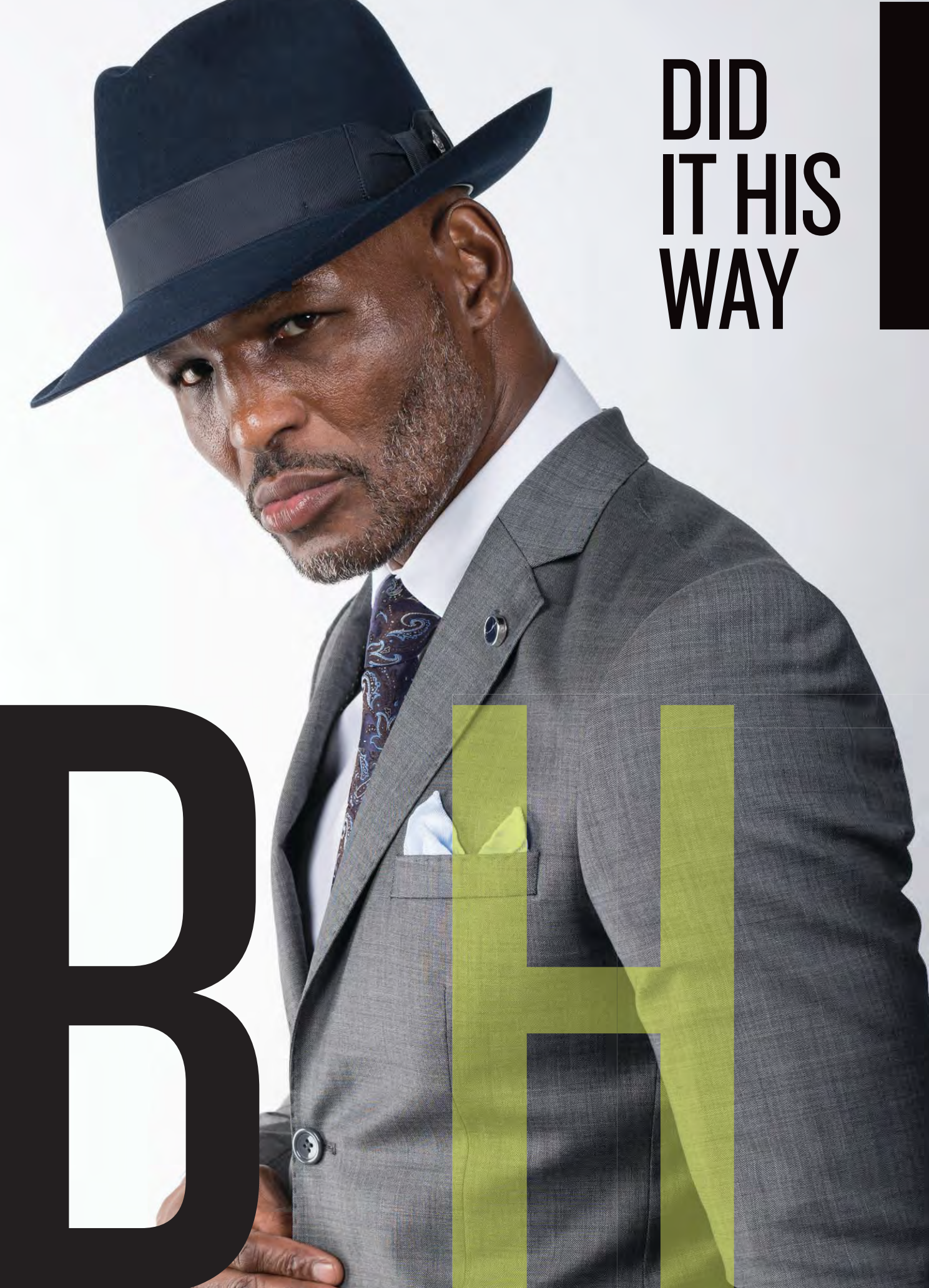


DID IT HIS WAY

BERNARD HOPKINS LEAVES A LEGACY OF VICTORIES AND WISDOM THAT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND THE RING

By **Ron Borges**
Photos by **Matthew Heasley**

Bernard Hopkins is taking no chances this time, beyond the ones he has so often accepted as the risk of living the pugilist's life.

Long ago, Hopkins learned that few people can be trusted in boxing, and that often includes the boxer himself. Prizefighting, you see, is the sport of deception as much as destruction, the path to victory often littered with traps set

by opponents both seen and unsee Hopkins' ability to avoid some whi setting others has long been one o his most enduring attributes. In man ways, it has been the foundation of h fistic success.

Perhaps because of that, in the fin boxing contract he will ever sig Hopkins included a clause that assure that at 51 years old this would be h final fight. There would be no mo traps set. If he chooses to try and tak another path to the ring after facin young Joe Smith Jr. on December 1 at the Forum in Inglewood, Californi he will face a daunting task. He w have to sue himself.

Hopkins' resolve to finally retire after a lifetime in boxing comes at an age when few men would even consider shadowboxing, let alone the more vicious version he is still practicing. He has always been both real and a realist when it comes to prizefighting's dark art and because of that, while he knows he can still beat many of the young fighters put in front of him, he concedes that time has taken its toll on him.

That was made clear 25 months ago, the last time he ventured into the war zone that is a boxing ring. That night Hopkins wore both the IBF and WBA light heavyweight title belts when he slipped between the ropes, having continued a string f fights in which each time he won h became once again the oldest man t accomplish something significant.

On May 21, 2011, Hopkins traveled to the Bell Centre in Montreal and wrested the WBC title from hometow hero Jean Pascal, avenging an earli draw he felt was unjustified and, 46, becoming the oldest man to w a world title (the previous record had been set by George Foreman, who wa 45 when he beat Michael Moorer). A 48, Hopkins broke his own record by beating Tavoris Cloud in 2013. Between a defense against Karo Murat later that year and Beibut Shumenov in 2014 he became the oldest man to hold a title, beating Foreman again. Against Shumenov he also acquired a second belt and pushed his own title-winning record to 49 years old.

But then came a long night with WBO titleholder Sergey Kovalev,

One of the not-so-secret secrets of Bernard Hopkins' success was his remarkable conditioning, even after 50.

Hopkins never lost his intensity or dedication.

who surprisingly dropped Hopkins in the opening round and then outboxed him for the final 11 to win a one-sided and unanimous decision that unified three of the 175-pound titles. The belts Hopkins entered the ring with did not leave with him. Like all boxers at some point, he left the ring alone.

While it was surprising to see him on the floor, it was remarkable to watch him work his sly sleight of hand for 12 rounds against a man 18 years younger and with a level of skill few in boxing felt he possessed. Bernard Hopkins couldn't find a way to win that night but he found a way to get by. Sometimes that is what life demands. Sometimes all you can do is survive the storm by refusing to give in to it and wait for a new day.

For Hopkins, that was the December day he was set to square off with Smith in a fight dubbed "The Final One." That day he gave himself one last chance to come out a winner in the ring before ending his time in a sport that quite literally saved his life.

"A day comes when you have to stop, including in life," said Hopkins (55-7-2, 32 knockouts). "This is it. I'm done. I'm working hard but I'm not tricking myself. I know I'm not the same as I was 20 years ago. I'm not the same as I was two years ago.

"I've camouflaged a lot of s--- the last five, six years. I used to be more aggressive. The first half of my career I was very aggressive. I'm not that way anymore.

"In the second half of my career I couldn't be the Philadelphia fighter no more. I had to fight a different way. I tricked people and made them pay for it.

"People say, 'Bernard, you're old. You're rich. You don't need to fight. Accept it.' I'm not accepting s---. I'm going to challenge it. It comes down to choices until you go in the dirt and I choose this – one last fight.

"I'm not the same fighter but I'm the same guy. I don't need an alarm clock to get up and go to work. I don't need anyone to push me to spar or do cardio or to prepare for what's coming. If I'm not up before 7 in the morning, you better come in and check my pulse.

"To do this thing in my 50s is different than in my 30s or my 20s. I understand that. But this fight is about more than just winning a fight against someone who is 27 years old. I want to make a statement that if you give yourself a chance, you win.

"The past is written in stone. This fight is not to go left or right or change or add on (to his fistic resume). In my career, there is much for people to debate. This fight won't change that. I'm just making sure, while I'm on this earth, that there's no stone left unturned. The truth is, in the end, Bernard is going to do what he wants if he believes he can do it."

Belief in himself is one thing Hopkins has always had. Even at times when no one else seemed to share it, his opinion has always been that he was more than people's opinions of him were.

He set about proving that 30 years ago and, after a long struggle, he changed minds and opinions. He made his case. He won more than fights. He won respect, sometimes grudgingly given but given all the same.

It is one reason why, in recent years, Hopkins has often made his ring walk to the Frank Sinatra anthem "My Way," a song written by Paul Anka but made a philosophical life statement by Sinatra. Its words seem to encompass Hopkins' approach to life, a life that has not been easy.

Sent to Graterford Prison for nearly five years at the age of 17 after having gravitated toward a life of petty crime and violent encounters, Hopkins seemed an unlikely candidate for long-term success.

When he was released from prison, warden Buddy Rush told him he'd be waiting for him when he returned in six months. Hopkins vowed that would never happen and it did not, despite having to walk off nine years of parole in neighborhoods of Philadelphia where a life of crime was one of the few means of upward mobility for a young black man with a limited education.

Remember when BHop looked like this?

Hopkins was reacquainted with boxing in Graterford and turned pro not long after returning home, but he lost his first fight to a fellow named Clinton Mitchell and didn't enter another prizefight for a year. By the time he did, Mitchell was gone, disappearing for five years himself in the way young men can when their options are limited.

During that year between fights, Hopkins went to a particular trade school. He went to the gym, where he learned to work with his hands in a deadly trade. He prepared himself for the life of a boxer. And when his second chance came he seized it.

It took him seven years to win the IBF version of the middleweight title, but once he captured it he refused to relent. Despite well-documented disputes with promoters and television executives, Hopkins would make a record 20 successful defenses (19 wins and one no-contest) of that title, finally becoming the first unified middleweight champion since Marvin Hagler.

He would defeat big name opponents like Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya, but his methodical nature, both in and outside the ring, defied the logic of being nicknamed "The Excutioner." It bothered fans and led to considerable criticism of his business practices – such as fighting only once in 18 months after beating Trinidad – but Hopkins pressed on and become a millionaire boxer with a Hall of Fame resume, always marching to the sound of his own drummer.

As important as those things are to him now, as the final curtain is set to fall, what is even more important is that he knows his battle hymn truly reflects his story.

"Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
"When I bit off more than I could chew
"But through it all, when there was doubt
"I ate it up and spit it out
"I faced it all and I stood tall
"And did it my way"

Indeed Bernard Hopkins did. He faced the challenge of every name opponent of his era and beat most of them. Some, like Trinidad, he beat against long odds.

He didn't always win, of course, because no one does if he stays in the arena as long as Hopkins has. But that is not really the point.

"My legacy is not just winning, because sometimes I didn't win," Hopkins said. "In life, you will be challenged. Sometimes you will lose

went to press. For coverage of Hopkins' goodbye fight, go to RingTV.com.

Hopkins' wardrobe says both success and good taste.

because life is about loss as much as it is winning.

"Everybody loses things in life. People. Titles. Money. What do you do after those losses? What do you do when those challenges come?

"In the boxing ring, there's no rich or poor. There's just fighting. In training, you can correct problems that arise. You can prepare. But if you step into that ring when the lights are on and you're not ready, you have a problem.

"I've always tried to balance my thinking. To talk with confidence I must train to have that confidence. That's what keeps me going to Joe Hand's Gym (in North Philadelphia). Sure, I got muscle memory and my memory is good, but I still got to put in the work if I want to call myself a fighter.

"There's something about the ending that sticks with people longer than the rest of it. People remember how it ended. I understand that. It is what drives me now.

"I want people to remember me. 'He was 51 and he beat that boy's butt.' If this is the last chapter of the book, I want it to be an ending people will remember."

So did Sinatra when he sang "My Way." Remember the ending?

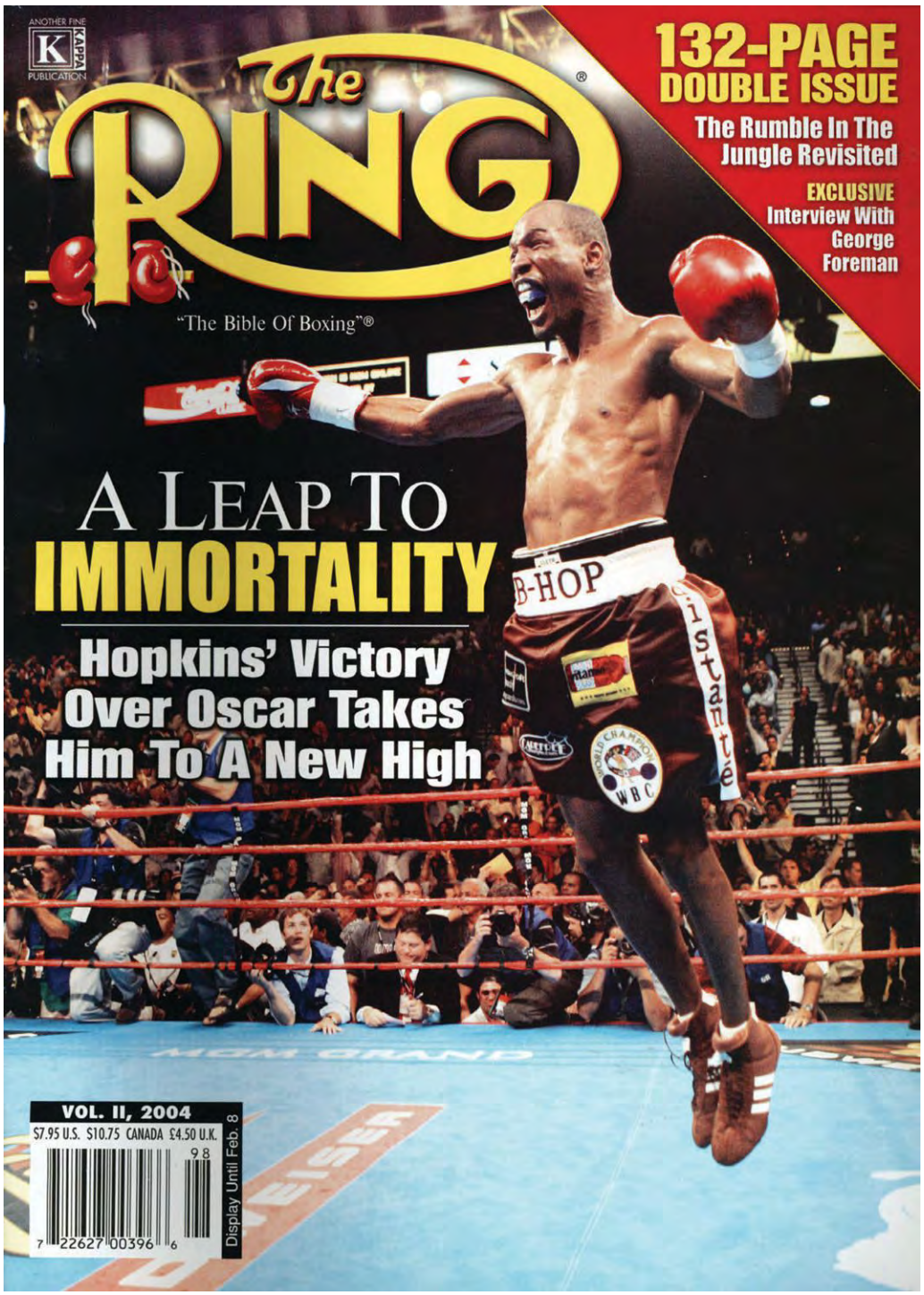
> "For what is a man?
> What has he got?
> "If not himself, then he
> has naught
> "To say the things he
> truly feels
> "And not the words of
> one who kneels
> "The record shows, I
> took the blows
> "And did it my way
> "Yes it was my way"

Start to finish, win or lose, right or wrong, that's how Bernard Hopkins did things. That, more than his ring records and championship belts, is the true legacy of Bernard Hopkins. In an often down-and-dirty sport, he stood tall, he did it all, and did it his way. RING

MY GREATEST VICTORIES

BERNARD HOPKINS REVEALS HIS MOST GRATIFYING SUCCESSES IN THE RING

This is one in a series of columns by future Hall of Famer Bernard Hopkins, who gives us his thoughts on various subjects important to every boxer and fan. This issue: In a special RING IQ, which accompanies our cover story, Hopkins looks back on his career.



I knew I was in trouble this month when I was asked if I could think about my five greatest victories. A question like that tells you that your time is running out. But people have been saying that about me for the last 20 years – and I still keep on going. But in all honesty, this is it. My last fight will be over by the time you read this. I'm done, through, no more.

I can gladly look back at my career and tell you what five fights that I'm most proud of, which I'll present in descending order:

5. D 12 Segundo Mercado, Dec. 17, 1994.

This is the fight that told me I can fight at a world-class, championship level. This fight is the base of my foundation. It's what broke the ice for me. I fought at some place called the Ruminahui

Bernard Hopkins believes his KO of Oscar De La Hoya earned him universal respect.

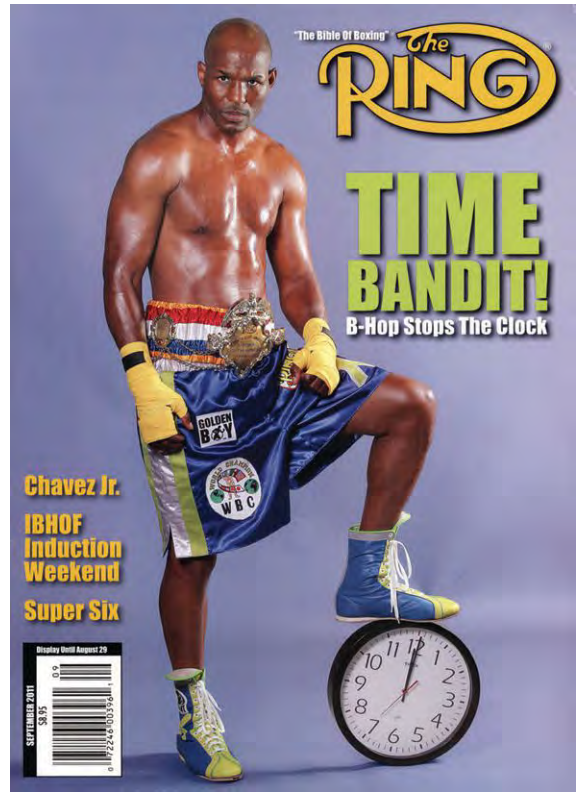
Coliseum in Quito, Ecuador, and I thought I rallied to win after I got knocked down twice in that fight. Anyone who knows me knows I don't trust anything, and Ecuador certainly wasn't a good place to be in at that time. It wasn't exactly a place to go for a vacation. We're talking about a Third World country. I've been to Camden, New Jersey, but compared to Ecuador, Camden was like the Society Hill section of Philadelphia. I worry about everything. I've seen a lot of bad water, because remember, I did five years in prison. They had deep blue water coming out of the spigots down there. I don't know what kind of water it was, but they drank it like it was nothing. I only wanted to be treated fairly. I wasn't (treated fairly) down there, and I still came home with a draw.

4. W 12 Kelly Pavlik, Oct. 18, 2008.

I ended a lot of people's careers after they faced me, and I think beating Pavlik the way I did changed his career. He beat Jermain Taylor twice, and I had something to prove. Taylor beat me, but he really didn't beat me. Politics took the first Jermain Taylor fight from me. The get-back is Kelly Pavlik squashes Taylor, kills him. Then they put Kelly Pavlik in with me. It's not about styles make fights. I can't let anyone sneak out of the back door with that theory. Not about me. The Pavlik fight was a payback and that exposed the whole Jermain Taylor thing. That set up Pavlik to be ruined. It had killed me to make 160 by the time I fought Taylor. I fought Pavlik at 170 and people got to see what I could really do. I redeemed myself in the Pavlik fight.

3. W 12 Antonio Tarver, June 10, 2006.

I had historic fights in the light heavyweight division, which I think puts me in the conversation of all-time light heavyweight greats. I'm not saying that I'm one of the greatest light heavyweights ever, but I feel I belong in there because I beat guys like Tarver. I had no chance, remember, I was through. I was coming off the back-to-back losses to Taylor, and if I remember right, he beat Roy Jones twice and (had) a rematch victory over Glen Johnson. I wasn't supposed to be anything for Tarver. He ran around crying, saying someone did something to his water. I beat him. He gained that weight for the Rocky movie, and then thought he'd add my name to his resume. Look what happened to him since that fight, and look what happened to me. Tarver has a big mouth. I shut him up.



Hopkins definitely defied time.

2. KO 12 Felix Trinidad, Sept. 29, 2001.

Everyone thinks this is my No. 1 fight. It's rare when you set out to do something and do it better than you even planned it out. That's what happened here. This fight I like to call the door opener. Trinidad had been knocking everyone out. People thought this guy was indestructible. I broke him down piece by piece. No one thought I could do it. People could go back and watch that historic night at Madison Square Garden. I even get a little choked up when you think of two men, myself and Tito, who fought under enormous stress. Someone had to deliver out of the two of us, but look at the performance. I was fighting for the ultimate respect that I never got before in my career but always felt that I deserved. To me, I was fighting for everything. That opened up other big fights for me. Oscar De La Hoya wanted to fight me because I beat Tito.

1. KO 9 Oscar De La Hoya, Sept. 18, 2004.

This is the win that made me a superstar. Boxing fans knew who I was, but this fight made the sports world notice me. It made me one of the top pound-for-pound fighters in the world. It took me over the top, where I always felt I should be. You can say beating Oscar the way I did enlightened a lot of people as to who I am. No one ever beat Oscar that way. Everyone thought that I was ripe for the picking. I was in a bunch of decision wins before Oscar and people thought I couldn't hurt anyone. I did. Beating Oscar forced people to give me my respect and recognize me as one of the world's best. Fans had to finally give me credit.

A WELCOME CONTROVERSY

THE PASSIONATE DEBATE THAT FOLLOWED **ANDRE WARD-SERGEY KOVALEV** PROVED THAT BOXING STILL MATTERS. NOW THEY MUST DO IT AGAIN.

By **Norm Frauenheim**

AP

If controversy is a way to measure boxing's vital signs during an era when the sport has again been placed on the endangered list, if not already declared extinct, its noisy heartbeat was there, loud and clear in the wake of Andre Ward's victory over Sergey Kovalev.

The scarred beast is alive and kicking, if not exactly well. Then again, when is it ever healthy? Boxing and healthy are a little bit like jumbo and shrimp. Put the two together and you've got that classic oxymoron.

But just when it looks as if the public has had its fill, an appetite for more suddenly makes itself heard. It was heard again and again in deafening decibels throughout an ongoing debate over Ward's narrow decision – 114-113 on all three cards – over Kovalev for three pieces of the light heavyweight title.

Anger, outrage, insults, allegations, suspicions, epithets and the rest of the usual suspects seemed to jump aboard Facebook, Twitter and all of the other modern platforms in what has been – and still is – a timeless controversy.

Agree or disagree, all of that screaming sounded like many still

The fight between Andre Ward (left) and Sergey Kovalev was entertaining but inconclusive.

Ward hit the canvas in the second round, the most dramatic moment of the fight.

care about a battered game that others have tried to bury. If nobody cared, the decision would have come and gone like a quiet funeral.

But a buzz was there at T-Mobile Arena in the immediate aftermath and throughout the next couple of days. It was contentious and crazy. Above all, it's been lively. And other than the judges' scorecards, none of it can be described as unanimous.

The post-fight interest has been surprisingly widespread, especially for a 175-pound fight that before the opening bell was not expected to attract a big pay-per-view audience for the HBO telecast. Through it all, there's growing agreement about one thing:

A rematch.

The post-fight news conference often sounded as if the two parties had already begun negotiations. But talks could get complicated. Throughout the promotion, tension between the fighters' camps had been building.

"I think it's simple," Ward said after the weigh-on at the MGM Grand on the eve of the opening bell. "He doesn't like me. I don't like him."

Don't expect that to change a whole lot. If anything, indications were that mutual dislike would only heighten.

Kovalev promoter Kathy Duva of Main Events confirmed that the Russian light heavyweight's contract included a clause for an immediate rematch. She said she would not wait to enforce it.

"We have 30 days to make the decision and we've already made it," she said.

However, Ward manager James Prince sidestepped the question of whether there was a rematch clause.

"All things are possible," Prince said after Ward took the IBF, WBA and WBO belts from Kovalev. "We're going to soak in this one we have here now. We're never scared, you know what I mean? We know what it is. When the time and place comes in, we'll start talking about that.

"We're driving the ship now. Kovalev's team drove it the first time. We're behind the wheel on this one."

Meanwhile, Michael Yormark of Roc Nation Sports, Ward's promoter, said it was too soon for talk about a second fight.

"It's too early to discuss a rematch at this point," said Yormark, who wouldn't even say whether there was in fact a rematch clause. "Andre will enjoy the moment, spend time with his family and, obviously, embrace those three belts. We'll decide where we go from here over the next weeks."

For Ward, there are options, including speculation about a bout with Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. A few years ago, there were rumors about Ward fighting Chavez, a former middleweight titleholder.

A possible bout against the son of the Mexican legend has been seen as a way to further market Ward to a big and loyal segment of the boxing fan base. It never happened because of Chavez's erratic training habits and

inability to make weight. Over the last couple of months, however, Chavez said he has recommitted himself. During the week before the Kovalev bout, Ward himself said that a bout with Chavez would be a good one.

There's also Adonis Stevenson, who holds the WBC's version of the crown. Stevenson called out Ward on social media not long after the scores were announced. At 39, Stevenson is running out of time and options.

Duva fired a warning shot at any plan Ward might have at fighting anyone other than Kovalev in his next bout. According to terms of the clause, she said both sides would have to strike an agreement that would allow Ward to fight somebody else in his first defense. Translation: He would probably have to pay Kovalev a substantial step-aside fee.

Whether the two camps could settle some of their personal differences and come to any kind of agreement appeared problematic, however, especially in heated moments after the 12th and final round.

Throughout the promotion, Duva had hinted at frustration at working with Ward, his outspoken trainer Virgil Hunter and Roc Nation. Hunter bristled when he said he had been told that Duva had said she "came from a different type of business."

Jay Z's Roc Nation has its roots in the music industry.

"She puts off that air, that superior air, that entitlement air," Hunter told two reporters as he left T-Mobile Arena after the post-fight news conference. "She's upset because it didn't work."

But money can solve a lot of differences. And there might be more of it in a sequel to the first bout, which was worth $2 million (plus a portion of the pay-per-view revenue) for Kovalev and $5 million for Ward.

Both fighters talked as if they knew the fans were already looking forward to a rematch. Anything but an immediate one might cool anticipation for a sequel in a newfound rivalry with drama that is part and parcel of the mounting tension.

ANDRE WARD UD 12 SERGEY KOVALEV
NOV. 19, 2016, T-MOBILE ARENA, LAS VEGAS

Actor Michael B. Jordan, the star of "Creed," and Gennady Golovkin were among those at the fight.

REPORT CARD

THE MAIN EVENT
A-

The fight wasn't action-packed but there was plenty of drama because of its competitiveness and the stakes. Finally a pay-per-view fight lived up to its billing.

WARD
B+

Ward probably isn't the same fighter who wowed the boxing world early in his career but the guile and grit he used to battle back against Kovalev was impressive.

KOVALEV
B+

Kovalev demonstrated that he could match skills and wits with one of the most gifted boxers of his generation, which enhanced the Russian's reputation.

VIRGIL HUNTER
Ward's trainer

A

Hunter not only helped Ward adjust after his slow start – including the knockdown – he also made sure that his fighter never stopped believing in himself.

JOHN DAVID JACKSON
Kovalev's trainer

B

Jackson didn't have much to say between rounds. And there didn't seem to be enough urgency in the corner when rounds were close.

THE JUDGES
B+

I can't be critical of judges who scored the fight exactly as I did but I have no beef with those who feel Kovalev should've won. The B+ (as opposed to an A) is a nod to them.

ROBERT BYRD
The referee

B+

I have no problem with referees allowing fighters to jostle inside as long as it doesn't become excessive and bring the fighting to a standstill. I don't think it did in this case.

THE ATMOSPHERE
A-

The crowd rebounded from a horrible undercard (see below) with good energy for the main event. They generally supported Ward but also seemed to appreciate a good fight.

THE UNDERCARD
D-

The only reason the undercard doesn't get an F here is that two-time Olympic champ Caressa Shields gave a good show. Otherwise … borrrrrrrrrrring.

– **Michael Rosenthal**

A WELCOME CONTROVERSY

"Of course I want the rematch," Kovalev said. "And I will kick his ass."

After his first loss and angry at the judging, Kovalev (30-1-1, 26 knockouts) sounded as if he were ready and willing for another opening bell about an hour after the first one had rung.

"It's the wrong decision," said Kovalev, whose nose was bloodied at the center of an otherwise unmarked face. "I don't want to say my opinion. The witnesses are here. They saw it. It was a fight of my life. I am disappointed.

"He got maybe a few rounds. I agree with that. But I kept control. I lost maybe three rounds the whole fight."

There was not that kind of urgency from Ward (31-0-0, 15 KOs), whose poise and patience have been an unshakable trademark in the two decades since he last lost a fight as a 13-year-old amateur. Ward looks, listens, thinks and adjusts before he acts.

"Of course I would do a rematch," Ward said. "But I am not going to negotiate a fight right now. I will go home and relax and see what's next."

Pressure for a rematch appears to be the only thing demanded by exasperated fans trying to forget about the disappointment left by Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s dull decision over Manny Pacquiao in May 2015. They're also increasingly upset that Canelo Alvarez has yet to fight middleweight titleholder Gennady Golovkin and probably won't until at least September.

Anticipation for Ward-Kovalev II could mollify the anger over Mayweather-Pacquiao and the frustration over the Canelo-GGG delay.

More important, however, is the decision itself. One point on each scorecard left countless questions. Virtually every controversial decision does. Most of the answers will have to come from Ward, who will be asked to prove that judges Glenn Trowbridge, John McKaie and Burt Clements were right.

At ringside and in television studios, the margins were as different as the opinions, even among some of the most respected figures in a subjective business. Retired HBO analyst Larry Merchant, who was at the fight, told ringside media that he thought Kovalev won by three or four points.

"Late in the fight, I said, 'Ward can't win this fight unless he does some serious damage,'" Merchant said. "He never did. I don't know if I had it three or four points, but I had Kovalev clearly winning."

Former junior welterweight and welterweight titleholder Paulie Malignaggi, also a respected analyst for Showtime, had a much different view from Merchant and HBO's Harold Lederman, who had it 116-111 for Kovalev. The Associated Press also scored it 116-111 for Kovalev. On Malignaggi's card, for the U.K.'s Sky Sports, it was 116-112 for Ward.

"Andre bossed the fight," Malignaggi said.

Ward, who got up in the second round from only the second knockdown in his pro career, figures he did that and more. He foresees a similar result in a rematch.

"Obviously, a second fight would be more of the same," said Ward, who hid his bruised eyes behind a pair of sunglasses while seated in the ring for the post-fight news conference. "I honestly don't know if he can make many adjustments. His style is kind of set."

Maybe. Ward did manage to come back against Kovalev with the subtle moves that are his trademark.

In the opening rounds, Kovalev repeatedly employed a jab that landed with the impact of the thick end of a baseball bat. That jab set up everything the Russian did, including the right hand that dropped Ward on all fours in the second.

By about the sixth, however, Ward began to neutralize that jab by coming in under Kovalev's punches in an attack that often

OPINION

WARD-KOVALEV: ONE MAN'S TAKE

By Tom Gray

TEN YEARS FROM NOW, I WILL TELL BOXING experts that I made Andre Ward a one-point winner over Sergey Kovalev, and the instinctive temptation for me to duck for cover will undoubtedly still be there.

The furor surrounding the 12-round unanimous decision, which saw Ward lay claim to Kovalev's light heavyweight titles, was both predictable and surprising in equal measure.

Fight fans and media invest months in a main event that lasts less than an hour. When the superfight comes to an end and all of that excitement is replaced with controversy and disagreement, toys will fly out of the crib at breakneck speed.

I've been there – throwing and catching.

What mystifies me is that very few Kovalev scorers acknowledged the amount of close rounds in this contest. CompuBox, which, granted, serves merely as a useful guide, had Kovalev and Ward separated by only two landed punches in eight of 12 rounds.

Upon scoring the bout for a second time, I detected four sessions that, in my opinion, could have gone either way. For me, it was extremely difficult to split the participants in the third, fourth, fifth and final rounds because neither man won them decisively.

After watching these swing rounds twice, I gave Kovalev the third and the rest to Ward. Why? Because I preferred the American's punch picking to Kovalev's power and aggression, although I fully accept that these rounds could have gone the other way.

If all of my swing rounds go in favor of Kovalev, then I have a completely different scorecard. I would have had 116-111 for the defending champion.

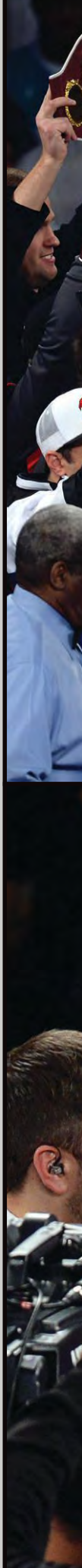
Fights are scored on the 10-point must scoring system, which in itself is flawed. Fighter A wins a round decisively, he is awarded a 10-9 score. Fighter B edges a round by the skin of his teeth, he is awarded a 10-9 score. You have an even fight, right?

Not in my eyes, but that's the scoring protocol.

There are those who claim that the decision was home cooking or agenda-based. Well, I'm from the U.K., and as brilliant as Ward is, he doesn't particularly float my boat as a prizefighter. I wasn't about to lose a wink of sleep either way.

I am far from myopic – 20/20 in fact – and what I saw was a close fight between two exceptional champions.

Doug Fischer believes Kovalev was robbed. Page 84.



Above, Kovalev entered the fight with three belts and a lot of confidence. Below, Ward was grateful to leave with the titles.

led to clinches, yet frustrated the Russian by taking away his ability to control the distance with punches from the outside.

Ward's ability to fight on the inside was the key to victory, Hunter said.

"Sergey calls himself the Krusher, but he's a kitty on the inside," he said.

There were complaints about the clinching from Duva, who compared the grab-hold-and-hold-on tactics to pro wrestling and mixed martial arts. Referee Robert Byrd should have been more proactive, said Duva, who criticized him for not stepping in more often to separate the two.

"My impression was that was the wrong decision," she said. "We thought (Kovalev) was clearly ahead on points. I think Ward could have a great career in the UFC. I haven't seen so much wrestling since Conor McGregor.

"I thought for sure it was not going to be a one-way fight, but the wrestling was outrageous. The referee didn't do anything about it, and I'm really upset. Sergey won the first six rounds, and he had a knockdown. How the hell did he lose a decision?"

Fair question.

Ward said he surprised Kovalev in the second round when he got up. Before the opening bell, Kovalev was supposed to be the tough guy, the stubborn Russian who ate adversity for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"I think me getting up drained some of his confidence," said Ward, who also felt his gritty display of courage in the second was a definitive answer to fans who believed him to be only a finesse fighter. "Sometimes you get tagged with being a slick boxer. But they see you get up and they say, 'Hey, he does have toughness.'

"I literally smiled at him when I got up. I think I deserve credit for that. I mean, he was the big bogeyman and all of that.

"He'll remember that, and I just think that the second fight will be a lot more clear-cut."

The sooner, the better. RING

STAY TUNED

THE EMERGENCE OF PBC AND LIVE STREAMING IS CHANGING THE WAY BOXING IS DELIVERED TO ITS FANS

By **Steve Kim**

The launch of Al Haymon's ambitious Premier Boxing Champions series at the start of 2015 showcased the sport on several major U.S. networks and cable channels. For a year and half, there was more televised boxing than most fans could keep up with.

But PBC's extensive time-buy operation appeared to slow down considerably by the end of last summer. With no PBC shows scheduled on NBC, CBS or ESPN for the fall, no significant cards on Showtime at the time and news of HBO passing on big fights due to rumored budget cuts, more than a few boxing fans and members of the media worried about the sport's future on American television.

However, as is often the case, boxing people might have allowed their collective angst to get the better of them. Despite some premature reports of PBC's demise, Haymon's organization announced that it would stage more than 60 televised shows in 2017. Showtime announced a strong late 2016-early 2017 schedule and HBO appears to have pieces in place to televise many high-profile bouts in the new year.

PBC will include a regular rotation

The good news is that you can still kick back and watch plenty of boxing on television.

Shawn Porter has been a popular television fighter.

of cards on the following networks: Fox, Fox Sports 1, Spike, NBC, ESPN, Showtime/CBS and Bounce TV.

A late October press release included this statement from Tim Smith, a spokesman for Haymon Boxing:

"The Premier Boxing Champions series will continue its mission in 2017 of making the sport available to the widest possible audience. Through its first two seasons the PBC will have broadcast over 90 shows, featuring surprising upsets, spectacular knockouts and hard-fought championship matches. The 2017 season of the PBC series will be the most exciting yet."

The network breakdown of the scheduled broadcasts is as follows:

- Fox will broadcast three primetime network shows, the first of which will be on February 25. FS1 will broadcast 25 shows, running from February through October.
- NBC will broadcast three primetime network shows in the second half of 2017, beginning with the first show on September 23.
- ESPN will broadcast 12 shows from April to August, with the first show on April 14.
- Spike will regularly broadcast shows as part of its Combat Sports Friday platform, beginning with the first show on January 13.
- Bounce TV will feature a quarterly boxing show, with the first broadcast on March 31.
- Showtime/CBS will broadcast select PBC series fights on dates throughout the year.

It's clear that, for the time being, PBC is still functioning and has no shortage of upcoming dates. The questions are: Where does that leave everybody else in the sport? And what is the future of boxing on networks that have been so tied to the sport the

past few decades?

For Showtime, which has already announced a solid lineup of fights (such as the Danny Garcia-Keith Thurman welterweight title unification bout scheduled for March 4), the commitment to boxing remains.

"I think what this announcement says among other things is that we're as committed as we've ever been to the sport, in terms of the amount of money, the amount of research, the amount of programming that we commit to it, and I don't see that changing in the foreseeable future," said Stephen Espinoza, vice president at Showtime.

"The past few years have been among the strongest in the history of the sport, and this year is the 30th anniversary of Showtime Championship Boxing. It certainly hasn't diminished in importance to the network and I don't see it diminishing at any point in the future."

During the first two years of PBC, the quality of Showtime's programming suffered as some of their mainstays were siphoned off to other networks. But it's evident that the tide has shifted as they are now scheduled to broadcast such bouts as the super middleweight title unification bout between James DeGale and Badou Jack and the rematch between Carl Frampton and Leo Santa Cruz.

When asked how the current state of PBC has affected his network, Espinoza answered, "I'm not privy to all of the PBC strategy but my sense is that you'll see a little bit more of a clear-cut division in terms of what programming goes where. We obviously want the best fights and all the best fights, (but) that's obviously not always going to happen. And it's just a virtue of the involvement of other networks and our own limitations of our budget and our schedule. But I do think it's important for us and for fans at home to know that the biggest and best fights will be on Showtime, that as a premium network the fights on Showtime will be premium level."

As for Showtime's rival across the street at HBO Sports, there has been a lot of speculation over their recent budget and just how tied they are to the sport. When asked for a comment, THE RING was given this statement from Peter Nelson, their executive vice president:

"HBO has a 43-year tradition in televising professional boxing. That is not only a commitment, it is also a bedrock of our platform. We have the biggest stars in the sport, and HBO has consistently been home to launching the biggest stars in boxing."

The reality is that short of pay-per-view, HBO and Showtime still provide the most lucrative vehicles for boxers and promoters with their hefty license fees. But before fighters can reach that stage, they must be developed into commodities that can generate a large audience. The reality is that with FS1 and franchises like "Friday Night Fights" (which aired on ESPN2 for years) no longer available to anyone outside the PBC, promoters must now find ways to keep their stables busy.

For Golden Boy Promotions (which at one point had cards on FS1) that meant striking a deal with EstrellaTV and doing monthly shows at the Belasco Theater and a regular set of cards at the Fantasy Springs Resort Casino. These cards are also streamed in their entirety on RingTV.com.

"We're going to continue to work with EstrellaTV and we're going to try to come up with other outlets, as well," said Eric Gomez, the president of Golden Boy. "There's some things we have in the works. Nothing is finalized yet, but we're looking to get more dates."

In 2016, Golden Boy averaged around two shows a month (which also included pay-per-view shows featuring Canelo Alvarez and HBO dates).

"We're hoping to build on that and we're more than capable of doing more," said Gomez. "So we're going to continue to pursue some of these networks (and) see if we can get dates."

It's not clear whether any other networks are still willing to actually pay for boxing after PBC changed the business model by purchasing air time with various channels. Gomez admits that "it's very difficult" now to get anyone to dole out a license fee to broadcast the sport.

'The state of the boxing business is promoters have to go out, do their own network shows, become content providers and not rely on premium networks.'

– Bob Arum

"Why pay for something you got for free?" said Kathy Duva, the head of Main Events, "But again, they need programming, they need content. We had our own experience with NBC. It out-performed their expectations, we brought things in on a budget that worked and they were very happy with it 'til someone came along and decided to pay them. Hopefully, in time, some of these networks come back because they need programming. Twenty-four-hour sports requires an awful lot of content and we are relatively cheap and easy to program as compared to major league sports. So yeah, will there be a place for us? Absolutely. But it's going to take some time.

We've got to work our way back."

Main Events recently announced that it would be doing a new series from the Mohegan Sun that will feature its young up-and-coming talent. Duva believes that eventually she'll have a deal in place to have these cards streamed. To her, this is the future.

"When I talk about a world in which the future is going all to online, television networks as we know them are probably not going to exist in the next 20 years the way they exist now," said Duva, who is fully aware that cord-cutting is taking place with many cable and satellite subscribers.

"We are a worldwide niche. Those borders are going to drop, things are going to be so different. I think Amazon is going to start providing content, Netflix (too). There's talk about changing the paradigm completely, and in all of those places I do think a sport like ours works, at least to get up and running."

Her rationale is very simple: "Because the same reason boxing worked on radio, it first worked on regular television, first worked on premium cable, every single platform that has ever been – boxing has been on first. And the reason is you don't have to deal with a big league, you don't have an expensive rights fee, you don't have all the hassle of scheduling. There's a lot of good reasons why we've always been there first, and when you get into a world where we don't depend on sponsors to pay our way, we're much better off. Sponsors are making judgments on whether or not they want boxing. You see PBC wasn't able to get sponsors the way they thought they would. There's good reason for it.

"One of them is that the people that run those companies don't see it as a safe sport to get involved with for whatever reason," she continued. "The second reason is that a fight can end at any moment and so a big fight needs a big budget and no sponsor is going to commit to something for an event that could last three minutes or less. When you get into a world where you have sponsors who are out there and they are being driven to you the way they are online now, where if you're interested in something you're going to see the ad for it and the nature of the content doesn't matter anymore.

"We know we get eyeballs, we've never had trouble doing that. We'll get the eyeballs and that's how I think we're going to survive in the end."

Bob Arum, the founder of Top Rank, Inc. – which recently distributed Manny Pacquiao's pay-per-view bout against Jessie Vargas independently – believes that the business is going through a seismic shift in terms of how to get its product out to the masses. He believes it's no longer enough to provide the content – boxing matches – and hope to collect a check from it.

"The state of the boxing business is promoters have to go out, do their own network shows, become content providers and not rely on premium networks," Arum said at the opening press conference for Vargas-Pacquiao last September. "Everybody, including us … it's like a drug – we rely on the premium networks for the cash, for the dates and so forth. That is not really conducive to building a business because you are subject to a lot of variations – corporate

'We will go back to some new version or normal – but it's going online, it's going to be very different from what the traditional methods of exposing the sport have been.'

– Kathy Duva

THE FUTURE OF PAY-PER-VIEW

SO JUST WHAT IS THE FUTURE of the pay-per-view business in boxing as the career of Manny Pacquiao winds down and Floyd Mayweather Jr. remains retired for the time being?

That question was posed to promoter Bob Arum, who recently staged Pacquiao's pay-per-view bout against Jessie Vargas without the help of any premium cable network. The fight reportedly drew 300,000 buys, far below the numbers Pacquiao once generated.

Arum admitted: "We don't know. I don't think there are pay-per-view stars; I think there are pay-per-view attractions." He continued: "(Gennady) Golovkin and Canelo (Alvarez) will do big business on pay-per-view. Canelo with a no-name won't do particularly big business, Golovkin with a no-name won't do particularly big business. But the two of them matched together will do big business. That's the way it's always been."

It's clear that pay-per-view, for better or worse, will remain a necessary evil in the boxing business because of the money the sport's top stars demand. But more than ever, the success and viability of this industry will hinge on the quality of the matchups, not just having a marquee name.

"It's always been more about the fights," Arum said emphatically. "You have to have a star, like for example Golovkin, who's a star. But Golovkin has to have an opponent that's a star as well to do (big) numbers. But that's always been the case.

"Oscar (De La Hoya) needed (Felix) Trinidad, he needed (Ike) Quartey, he needed (Pernell) Whitaker. These were stars."

– Steve Kim

The post-Mayweather-Pacquiao pay-per-view landscape will look different.

variations, budget situations.

"Essentially, it's very dangerous because a premium network programs for their subscribers. They don't have that second revenue stream and that is income from commercials because, as you know, they don't have commercials. So you put yourself in jeopardy of a budget crisis, whether it's on Showtime, whether it's on HBO, because they don't have that second stream of commercial income, which a regular network has."

There will be more boxing on television than ever in 2017, but at what cost for the future?

"I think we were on a roll going into 2014 ... and suddenly this deal came along and all of boxing was put into one person's hands," said Duva, referring to PBC and Haymon. "And everybody has had to suffer the consequences of that because that person did it very badly and failed. Part of what you have to do to be successful in boxing is to present great fights. That has not been done for so long."

Duva believes that the disappointment of the Mayweather-Pacquiao fight and the failure of PBC to create more mainstream fans has damaged the sport and its viability to those who may want to consider investing in boxing for the future.

"I think what has to happen for those of us who know how to do this right is to put on the best fights we can, to move forward in time," she said. "We will go back to some new version of normal – but it's going online, it's going to be very different from what the traditional methods of exposing the sport have been. The platforms are changing and I think with every new technology boxing has been the first one there, been the first one in the forefront because we are an affordable sport. We can present compelling content (and) we can do it on the schedule for whoever wants the content.

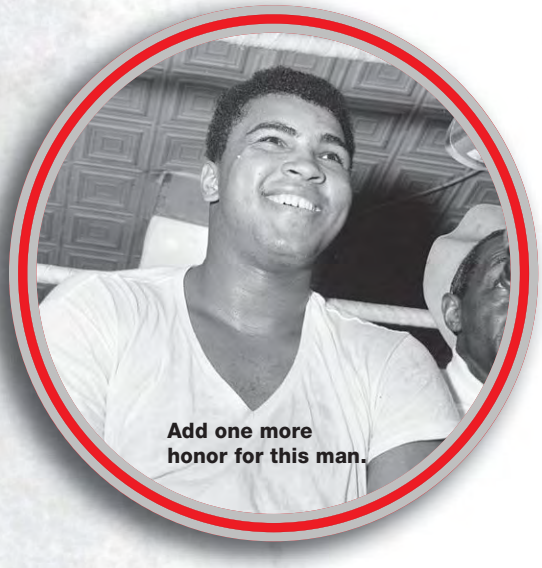
"I think there's going to be a big market for boxing – it's just going to look different from the market now." RING

Many believe Muhammad Ali was at his very best when he stopped Cleveland Williams in 1966.

BELATED JUSTICE

RING NAMES **MUHAMMAD ALI** FIGHTER THE YEAR FOR 1966 A HALF CENTURY FTER HE WAS DENIED THE HONOR OVER HIS OUT-OF-THE-RING STANCES

By **Michael Rosenthal**



Add one more honor for this man.

Times were different in 1966, when war was raging in Vietnam and many of those back ome were demonstrating ainst the conflict and for rights.

mmad Ali was in the thick had become heavyweight champion by virtue of his victory over Sonny Liston in 1964 and was making headlines for his stance against the war – he was refusing induction – and involvement with the controversial Nation of Islam.

Ali had a big year in the ring, winning all five of his title defenses. That included a third-round knockout of Cleveland Williams, a fight in which many believe Ali was at his very best.

The editors of THE RING Magazine at the time deemed Ali the best fighter of 1966 but they didn't name him Fighter of the Year because of his activity outside the ring; instead, no one received the honor.

It was only the second such instance; Primo Carnera was denied the honor in 1934 because of his alleged connections to the mob.

These are the criteria by which the editors determined the Fighter of the Year:

1. *The recipient of the Fighter of the Year prize and RING magazine merit award must be foremost in his contribution to the skill and to the science of boxing. He need not be a champion.*
2. *The Fighter of the Year must combine with his high place in the ranking of boxers a similarly high position as a sportsman.*
3. *The Fighter of the Year must associate with his abilities as a boxer good public relations and a reputation for clean and moral living.*
4. *The Fighter of the Year must be recognized as an example to the Growing American Boy.*

And this is how Dan Daniel, the co-founder of the magazine and longtime contributor, explained the editors' decision in the March 1967 issue of the magazine (see the complete original article on Page 74):

Since 1963 [when he was first honored], Clay has disqualified himself for a repeat award with these demerits:

1. *Cassius allied himself with the Black Muslims, who avowedly are not friendly toward the United States of America, and are not listed as a patriotic group.*
2. *Clay has entered a protest against his being drafted into the Army, and has laid claim to exemption from service, chiefly on the allegation that he is a student-preacher for the Mohammedan religion.*
3. *The champion boxer of the world has been guilty of utterances which have not redounded to the credit of boxing and which, arousing the vehement protests of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and other patriotic organizations, forced cancellation of Clay's scheduled fight with Ernie Terrell in Chicago, and had other bad repercussions.*

The regulations which guide and

govern THE RING magazine in its designation of the Fighter of the Year are composed of four paragraphs, the last of which says: "The Fighter of the Year must be recognized as an example to the Growing American Boy."

Most emphatically is Cassius Clay, of Louisville, KY, not to be held up as an example to the youngsters of the United States.

The decision of the editors might be deemed justified based solely on their policies at the time. They obviously felt strongly that Ali, while succeeding in the ring, didn't meet the other criteria.

And, frankly, a sizable segment of society undoubtedly applauded the editors for their stance. "Draft dodgers," among whom Ali was lumped by many, were seen as unpatriotic cowards in some circles.

However, we can see the injustice by today's standards even if we take issue with some of things Ali said and did. Bottom line: He was punished for standing up for his beliefs and his association with a controversial organization, factors that almost certainly wouldn't preclude a worthy candidate from winning a similar award today.

Ali refused induction in part because of the manner in which African-Americans were treated back home, a sentiment shared by many, and was willing to suffer the consequences – including prison time – if the courts upheld his conviction.

The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately didn't, reversing a previous appellate ruling by exonerating Ali by a vote of 8-0 in 1971. They deemed him a legitimate conscientious objector, saying his "religious beliefs are founded on the tenets of the Muslim religion as he understands them."

Of course, that ruling took place after the editors' decision to deny Ali the award, but it's not too late for us.

And while many took issue with the Nation of Islam – many still do – we feel that athletes under consideration for such awards should be judged by their performance, not their political or religious affiliations. That, we believe, is truly un-American.

We find particularly objectionable one sentence from the original article: "So many fight fans are against Muslim Clay personally that they refuse to see him in a proper fistic perspective."

Thus, we have decided to right what we believe is a wrong by naming Ali the Fighter of the Year for 1966 retroactively.

"Give it to him," friend and former rival Larry Holmes said rhetorically when he was told of our decision. "He was the best, wasn't he? You're (giving him the award) because he was the best at what he did.

"This has nothing to do with Vietnam, this is boxing. He was the best. You're rewarding him and giving him credit for that."

MUHAMMAD ALI: FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Muhammad Ali is a six-time RING Magazine Fighter of the Year now that he received the award retroactively for 1966. Here are the years he was honored (including his record each year). Note: Ali shared the award with Carlos Monzon in 1972.

1963 – 3-0 (Powell, Jones, Cooper)

1966 – 5-0 (Chuvalo, Cooper, London, Mildenberger, Williams)

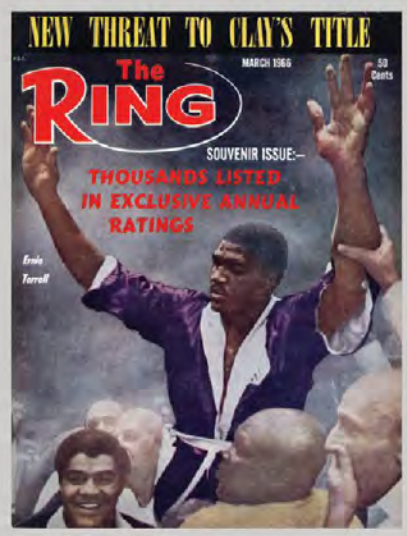
1972 – 6-0 (M. Foster, Chuvalo, Quarry, Lewis, Patterson, B. Foster)

1974 – 2-0 (Frazier, Foreman)

1975 – 4-0 (Wepner, Lyle, Bugner, Frazier)

1978 – 1-1 (Spinks loss, Spinks)

Editor's note: This article originally was published in the March 1967 issue of THE RING Magazine to justify the editors' decision to deny Muhammad Ali the 1966 Fighter of the Year award



FOR THE SECOND TIME SINCE THE Fighter of the Year citation was set up by THE RING in 1928, with an award to Gene Tunney, this publication finds it impossible to select a recipient of that high accolade, for 1966.

The precedent for failure to select the Fighter of the Year will be found in the summation of boxing achievements for 1933.

On June 29, 1933, Primo Carnera scored a sixth round knockout over Jack Sharkey and relieved the Boston Tar of the world heavyweight championship.

With a 13-round KO over Ernie Schaaf preceding the success against Sharkey, and a 15-round triumph over Paulino (Uzcudun) following the title acquisition, Carnera appeared to have a clear right fistically to the Fighter of the Year designation.

However, THE RING did not like those who were taking care of Carnera's business. It did not like the company Primo was keeping and could not, in all conscience and adherence to the regulations governing the Fighter of the Year selection, give the top honor to the heavyweight champion.

Now a similar situation prevents THE RING's setting up a Fighter of the Year, for 1966.

Strictly on the basis of achievement with his fists, Cassius Clay-Muhammad Ali, heavyweight champion, merits the outstanding citation for the past year.

THE RING gave the Fighter of the Year award to Clay for 1963. Why, then, does this magazine refuse to give it to him again, for

NO Fighter Of Year!!

Clay's Fine 1966 Record Discounted By Refusal To Accept Army Draft

By DAN DANIEL

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Strictly on the basis of achievement with his fists, Cassius Clay-Muhammad Ali, heavyweight champion, merits the outstanding citation for the past year.

The Ring gave the Fighter of the Year award to Clay for 1963. Why, then, does this magazine refuse to give it to him again, for 1966, when his fistic performances for the past year outshone those of 1963?

Since 1963, Clay has disqualified himself for a repeat award with these demerits:

1–Cassius allied himself with the Black Muslims, who avowedly are not friendly toward the United States of America, and are not listed as a patriotic group.

2–Clay has entered a protest against his being drafted into the Army, and has laid claim to exemption from service, chiefly on the allegation that he is a student-preacher for the Mohammedan religion. (Continued on page 58)

Above we find Dick Tiger in a state of exultation over his having wrested the light heavyweight title from Jose Torres in his most recent previous showing. Dick had lost the middleweight championship to Emile Griffith (below), who is shown in his moment of glory after the dethronement of the Nigerian.

Carlos Ortiz, who had an active and successful year, substantiating it his easy success against the veteran Flash Elorde, and highlighted by his five round disposal of the title aspirations of Sugar Ramos.

Here is the No. 4 man in the Fighter of the Year ratings, Curtis Cokes, the new welterweight champion of the world. Cokes achieved recognition after he had whipped France's Jean Josselin in a hot fifteen rounder at Dallas.

Vicente Saldivar, who retained his featherweight laurels against Hitoshi Seki, and accomplished the task with the skill and execution of a real champion. The way he rallied against the Japanese made Vicente the No. 5 entry among the Ring's Fighters of the Year.

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The extra-fistic activities, public utterances and domination by the Black Muslims which have worked against Clay are to be regretted all the more because of the champion's splendid ring record for 1966.

He marked the year with no fewer than five successful defenses of the heavyweight title.

Muhammad Ali started the year, in March, with his 15 round decision over George Chuvalo in Toronto, and followed with four consecutive knockouts in which he fought a total of only 24 rounds.

Cassius stopped Henry Cooper in six in London; Brian London in three, again in the capital city of Britain; Karl Mildenberger in 12 in Frankfurt; and Cleveland Williams in three in Houston, Tex.

The fight with Williams marked Clay's first appearance in the United States since November 22, 1965, when he stopped Floyd Patterson in 12 rounds in Las Vegas.

But for the circumstances which prevented Clay's designation as the Fighter of the Year his five victories would have been hailed as splendid highlights of a big heavyweight twelvemonth, reflecting tremendous credit on the sport and locating Cassius in the fistic niche in which he properly belongs.

As it is, Muhammad Ali fails of recognition not only as the Fighter of the Year but as a member of the all-time heavyweight aristocracy. So many fight fans are against Muslim Clay personally that they refuse to see him in a proper fistic perspective.

With Clay completely out of the Fighter of the Year situation, we find Dick Tiger the No. 1 man of 1966.

Dick dropped out of the elite corps when he lost the middleweight championship to Emile Griffith, the decision a close one. But the Nigerian rehabilitated himself with a smashing victory over Jose Torres, for the light heavyweight title.

In moving into the light heavyweight division and gaining its leadership, Tiger duplicated the feat of Griffith, who quit the welter class to make a successful foray in the ranks of the middleweights.

It was between Tiger and Griffith for the 1966 spotlight, and the Nigerian got the nod for a more emphatic triumph.

The No. 3 man in the 1966 list of highlighted boxers is Carlos Ortiz, lightweight champion, who clinched that position with a five round stoppage of Sugar Ramos in Mexico City, referee Billy Conn halting the fight, and a near-shutout victory over Flash Elorde in New York. The man from the Philippines was knocked cold, in the fourteenth round.

The No. 4 spot belongs to Curtis Cokes, who clinched his right to the vacant welter title by outpointing Jean Josselin, of France, in a tough fifteen rounder in Dallas.

The No. 5 entry on the standout list is Vincente Saldivar, featherweight champion, who had only two fights during 1966 but made good on both occasions.

A summation of the feats listed for the various accredited rivals for the 1966 spotlight made Clay's fistic leadership all the more emphatic.

But Cassius would not stand up for that leadership. He saw fit to repudiate it, an act without precedent in the history of the heavyweight class since it abandoned bare knuckles and put on gloves.

A THORN IN HIS SIDE

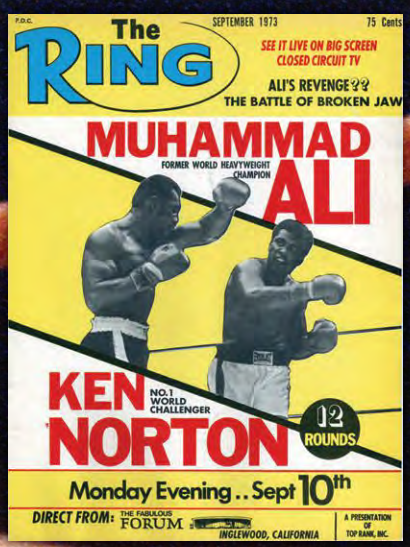
THE STYLISTIC NIGHTMARE PRESENTED BY **KEN NORTON** MADE **MUHAMMAD ALI'S** LIFE MISERABLE IN THEIR TRILOGY

By **Tom Gray**

In terms of scoring, it is arguably the most controversial fight of Muhammad Ali's glorious career.

On September 28, 1976, at Yankee Stadium in New York, Ali won a 15-round unanimous decision over boxer-puncher Ken Norton, who entered the bout as No. 1 contender. It was a huge event, marred by a New York police strike and the subsequent looting that took place inside the arena. But for many, the one man who was truly robbed that night was Norton.

It was the third bout between the pair. Norton had caused a sensation in March 1973 when he upset a lethargic Ali by a 12-round split decision in San Diego, breaking the former champion's jaw in a ruthless performance. Hall of Famer Eddie Futch, Norton's trainer, had spotted weaknesses in Ali's game that Norton could exploit and, in reality, the decision probably should have been unanimous. »



Muhammad Ali (right) always seemed to be in range for Ken Norton. This photo is from their second fight.

RING MAGAZINE

Five-and-a-half months later, Ali was in excellent fighting trim for the rematch at the Forum in Inglewood, California. He was the lightest he had been for almost three years (212 pounds) and his dancing feet were reminiscent of those peak years against Sonny Liston and Cleveland Williams. That was, at least, until Norton exacted a toll with a pulverizing body attack. A worn-down Ali resorted to duking it out in the late rounds and escaped with a razor-thin split decision of his own.

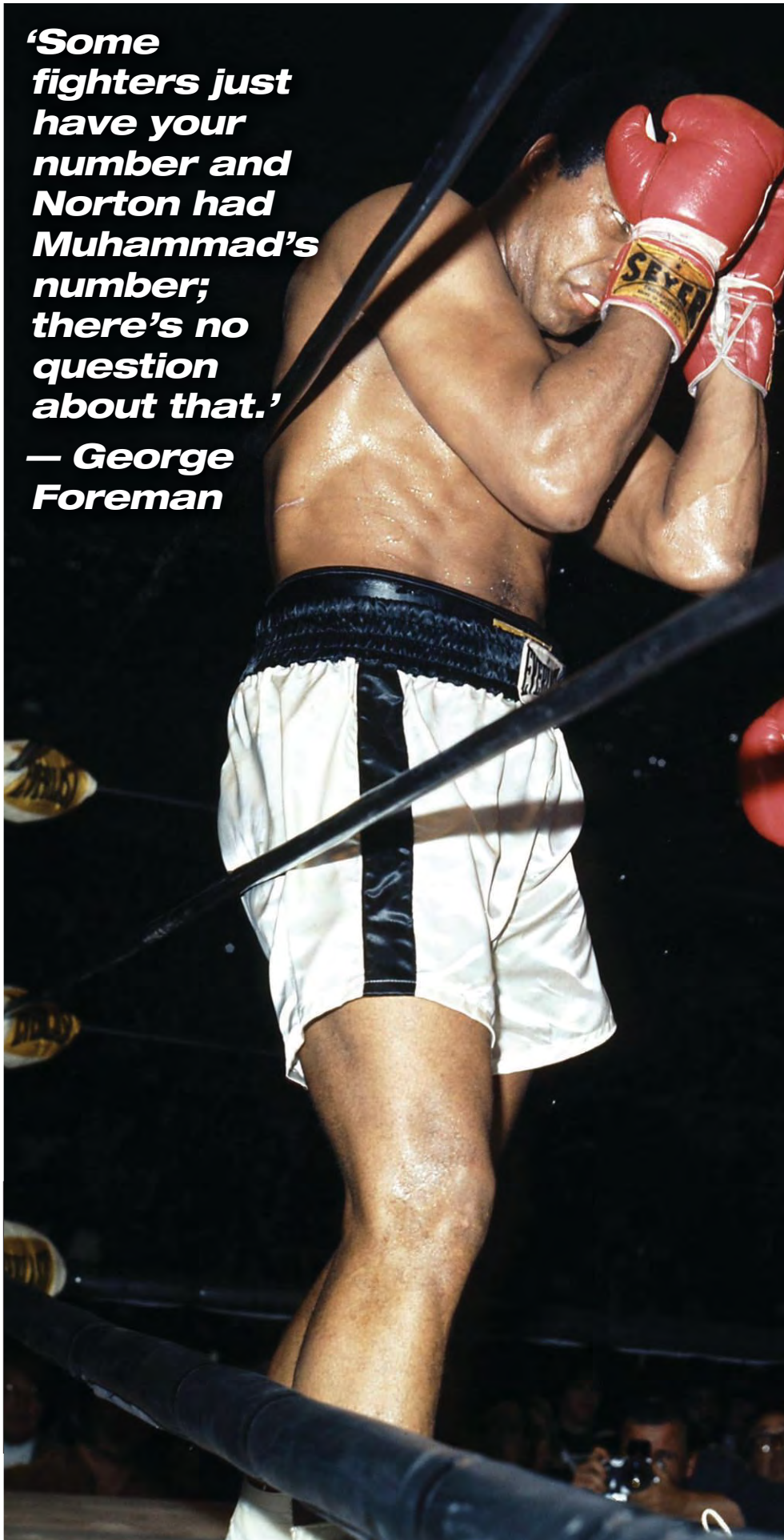
The rubber match was for the undisputed heavyweight championship and this time a victorious Ali left the ring disconsolate as thousands of disenchanted fans booed the most famous athlete on the planet.

Over the years, the third Ali-Norton bout has been re-examined frequently and it perpetually comes under the heading of "controversial." Now, perhaps for the first time, two legendary former heavyweight champions and common opponents of Ali and Norton offer their own opinions on that fight and an often overlooked rivalry.

"All I remember is that the result in that third fight angered the public," said two-time heavyweight champion George Foreman. "In my opinion, Ali didn't beat Kenny Norton in either of the first two fights and he didn't beat him in the third fight either.

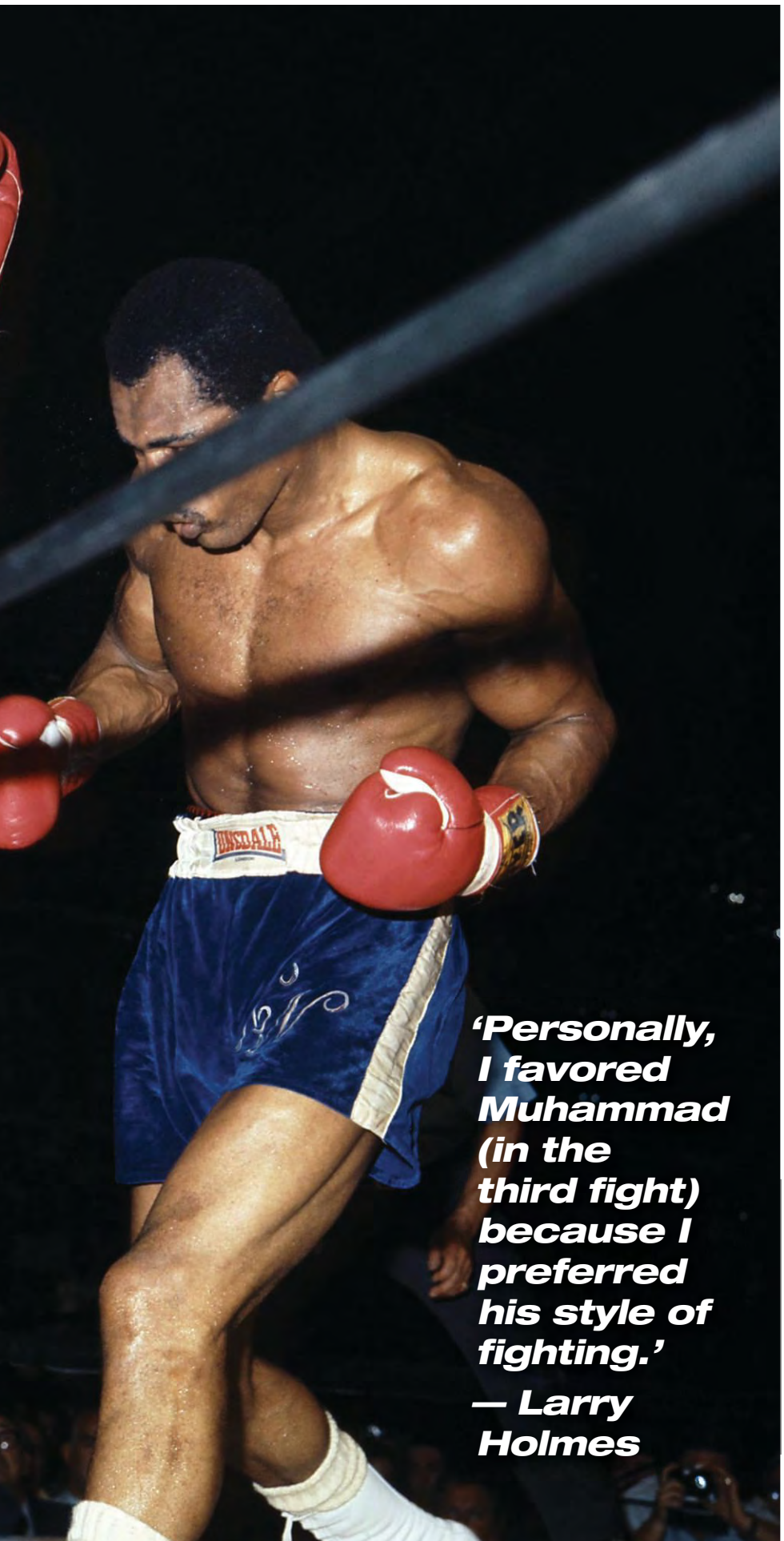
"It was Norton's style of keeping his right hand in front of his own face. He would catch Muhammad's (left) jab and was tall enough, with a long enough reach to jab back. (Joe) Frazier did well against Ali in close, but he didn't have the reach on the outside the way Norton did. Muhammad had a rough time with Norton and, what's more, he didn't have the punch to knock him out."

Foreman is right, of course. Stylistically, Norton was Ali's fistic "Da Vinci Code;" "The Greatest" looked more like "The OK'est" every time they shared a ring. In 39 rounds, you can count the number of times Ali hurt Norton on your thumbs and there was not one single knockdown in the



'Some fighters just have your number and Norton had Muhammad's number; there's no question about that.'

— George Foreman



Norton got the better of Ali – and the victory – in their first meeting.

entire trilogy.

Larry Holmes, another bona fide ring legend, learned his craft from Ali as a sparring partner before evolving into a brilliant boxer who ruled the heavyweight division for 7½ years. Holmes won the WBC version of the title in June 1978, going through hell on earth against Norton to claim a 15-round split decision.

Holmes was told that Foreman had Norton up 3-0 in the Ali-Norton series.

"I don't agree with that," snapped Holmes, when informed of his fellow Hall of Famer's opinion. "I thought (the rubber match) was a great fight and a very close fight. A lot of people felt Muhammad won and a lot of people felt Kenny won. Personally, I favored Muhammad because I preferred his style of fighting.

"When Ali and I used the ring against Norton we could control the action and win rounds. That side-to-side movement was something that Kenny couldn't deal with. I built up a big lead against Norton by doing that in our fight and then made the decision to stand with him and punch it out."

When it came to trench warfare, Norton, a former Marine, could hold his own with almost any heavyweight. He traded bombs with Ali, Holmes and Jerry Quarry, among others, but disaster struck when he faced the colossal Foreman. "Norton tried big hooks against me instead of jabbing because I had a harder jab," said Foreman, who, as champion, stopped Norton in two rounds in Caracas, Venezuela.

"I was also able to go to Norton's body to open him up. Ali was never a body puncher and he didn't have a really strong uppercut. When Ali fought me, I stood straight up with my hands down, so he was able to land the right hand. Ali couldn't do that with Norton, who kept his head low or leaned back. That gave Muhammad

real problems."

Norton's humiliating defeat to Foreman in March 1974 was hardly an aberration because he would be exposed by other punchers. Earnie Shavers clobbered him inside one round in March 1979, as did Gerry Cooney, who retired a faded version of the Adonis-like Californian two years later. Give Norton a terrific boxer and he was in his element; give him a big puncher and he struggled.

A peak Holmes, like Ali, excelled against home-run hitters. "The Easton Assassin" dominated Shavers twice and also scored a signature victory over Cooney in June 1982. "George could beat Kenny Norton because Kenny was made for him," said Holmes, once again highlighting that old adage that "styles make fights." "Against punchers, Kenny didn't have the ability to move side-to-side and he was vulnerable. You don't stand in front of George Foreman. You don't stand in front of Earnie Shavers. You don't stand in front of Gerry Cooney.

"You've got to move on guys who can hurt you, or they're going to get off with those big punches and take you out."

Ali and Norton were selling legitimate wars on the promotion trail.

Despite Foreman's declaration that Norton owned the trilogy against Ali, the affable 67-year-old made it clear that "The Greatest" remains exactly that. Ali has the vastly superior record and his accomplishments are beyond reproach, but Foreman's philosophy is simple: No fighter should be labeled unbeatable. There is always a bogeyman out there who is able to pick the lock of invincibility.

"Muhammad was a better overall fighter than Kenny Norton," Foreman said. "He had so much endurance, that great left jab and, if he was at his best, that quick right hand. You can't compare them in terms of who was the better fighter but, with that being said, he couldn't really beat Ken Norton.

"It was the same with me when I fought Muhammad. I've had other losses in my career, but the one guy who truly beat me was Muhammad Ali. Other fighters survived and won decisions, but Muhammad beat me. Some fighters just have your number and Norton

ALI VS. NORTON III

The third and final meeting between Muhammad Ali and Ken Norton, in 1976, was the most controversial of a competitive series. This chart includes the official scoring (by rounds, not 10-point-must). It also includes the card of RING contributor Tom Gray, who scored the fight from video. This is what Gray learned from that experience: "I scored all 15 rounds and expected to favor Ken Norton. It turns out, though, that while Norton may have dominated portions of the fight, Ali used his experience and cunning to steal close rounds and keep the encounter close. Scoring was on a rounds basis and there were no knockdowns so a close round was equally as important as a one sided round. Ali's victory was by no means a robbery but one can understand why Norton always felt aggrieved at losing the only world title bout contested between the pair." And, finally, included here are the CompuBox statistics, which were compiled from video in 2010.

Scoring for Ali-Norton III was on a rounds basis	*Ali*	*Norton*	*Even*
Arthur Mercante (bout referee)	8	6	1
Harold Lederman (official judge)	8	7	
Barney Smith (official judge)	8	7	
Tom Gray (THE RING Magazine)	7	7	1

	Total Punches	*Jabs*	*Power Punches*
Ali	199/709	71/345	128/364
	28%	21%	35%
Norton	286/635	94/289	192/346
	45%	33%	55%

Round	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Ali	15/41	13/32	15/47	10/36	7/13	4/17	17/66	15/45	9/44	11/54	22/74	14/48	24/78	13/59	10/55
	37%	41%	32%	28%	54%	24%	26%	33%	20%	20%	30%	29%	31%	22%	18%
Norton	9/18	26/50	12/38	16/33	31/79	23/64	16/31	34/59	5/11	14/30	24/43	23/46	22/51	20/56	11/26
	50%	52%	32%	48%	39%	36%	52%	58%	45%	47%	56%	50%	43%	36%	42%

RING MAGAZINE

Norton kept the pressure on Ali in their second fight but lost a disputed decision.

had Muhammad's number; there's no question about that."

So what if Norton had been given the verdict that night at Yankee Stadium 40 years ago? Would the future of the division have been vastly different? Would Ali have fought again? Could Holmes, who was waiting in the wings as a Top-10 contender, have become champion even sooner?

When Ali lost the undisputed title to a seven-fight novice in Leon Spinks on February 15, 1978, he lobbied hard for a rematch and Spinks accepted. The WBC, which had promised Norton a shot at the winner, responded by stripping Spinks of its title and awarded it to Norton, who had outpointed Philadelphia slickster Jimmy Young in an eliminator the previous November.

Norton lost to Holmes in his first defense, a classic war and Holmes' defining victory. "The Easton Assassin" is convinced that he beat the best heavyweight around at that time.

"Norton was given the (WBC) title but he would probably have beaten Ali (in a fourth fight) because he was stronger than Ali in 1978 and he was definitely stronger than Leon Spinks," said Holmes, who would go on to stop a faded Ali on October 2, 1980, for the lineal heavyweight championship.

"I think I became champion at the right time, and I doubt things would have been any different for me. I was brought along very well and got my big break against Kenny, who I believe was the man to beat at that time."

Ali vs. Liston and Ali vs. Foreman are favorites on ESPN Classic and readily available on DVD, as well as YouTube, the great Ali playing the magician and pulling off miracles against killer punchers. The Ali-Norton series is inconspicuous by comparison but provides stark evidence that even the greatest fighters in history are human.

Tom Gray is a U.K. Correspondent/ Editor for RingTV.com and a member of THE RING ratings panel. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

HAWK'S TIME

AARON PRYOR WAS A SPECIAL FIGHTER BUT IS ONE OF THE SPORT'S GREAT 'WHAT IF?' STORIES

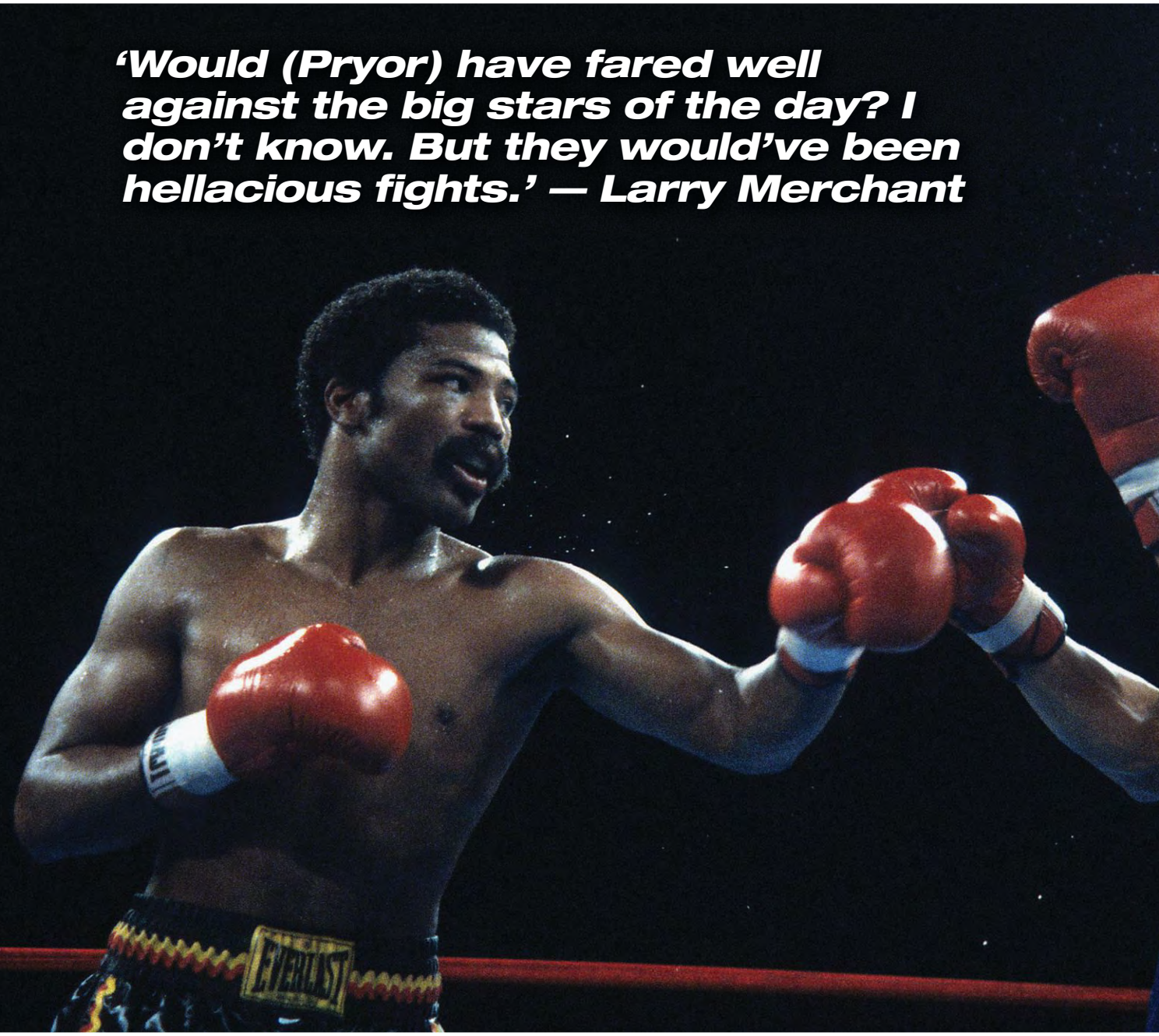
By **Don Stradley**

There was a time when Aaron Pryor's name was synonymous with self-destruction. The stories came at us fast and hard: There he was, walking the streets of Cincinnati like an emaciated ghost, talking to himself; there he was, sparring in an alley for cocaine money; there he was, sleeping on the floor of a crack house. By the time he landed in prison for drug abuse, we'd started to forget that he'd once been a damned good fighter, one who'd twice laid waste to the mighty Alexis Arguello. We forgot the crazy feats he performed, such as sparring 15 rounds without headgear or the way he'd rocket out of his corner at the opening bell. Instead, we kept a kind of vigil for this doomed man. When he died in October of heart disease at age 60, many of us were surprised. We didn't think he'd get past 40. He tricked us, didn't he?

Pryor fought with such ferocity that author Bert Sugar once likened him to "an endangered species in fear of his life." His aggressive style helped him win 39 of 40 professional bouts, 35 by knockout (including a 26-fight KO streak). During his 1980-85 zenith, he was the best junior welterweight on the planet. The only loss came late, after his left eye went dodgy and he was already hooked on cocaine. If you missed him at his best, we're about to tell you all about him. But there are so many facets to Pryor's helter-skelter career that we don't know where to start. »

Aaron Pryor is known best for his dramatic first knockout of fellow Hall of Famer Alexis Arguello.

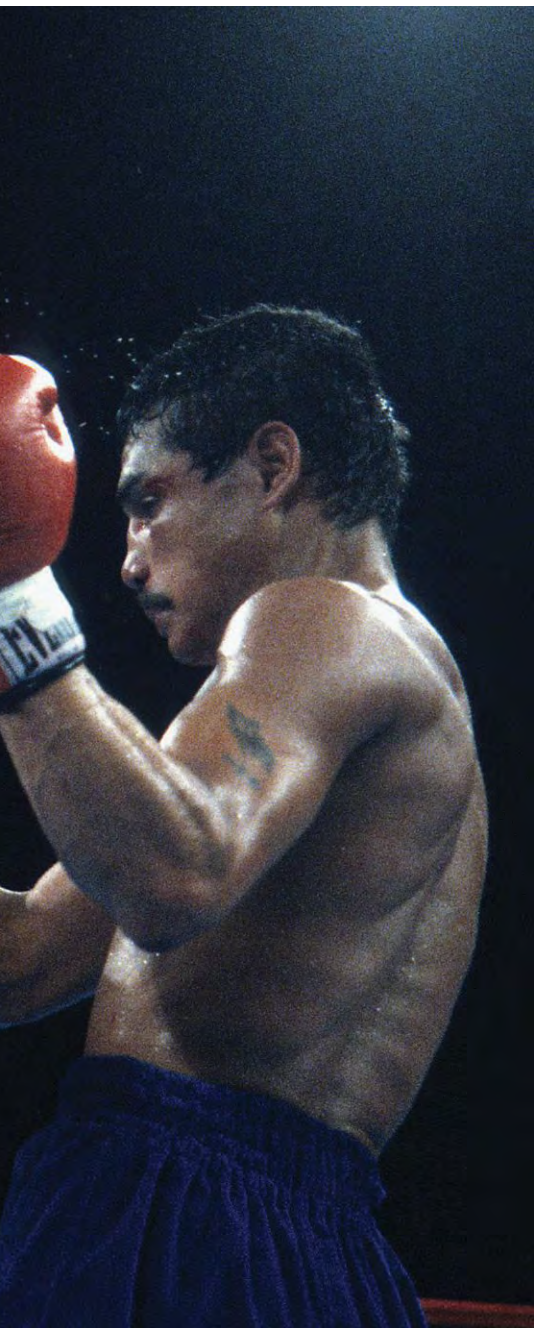
'Would (Pryor) have fared well against the big stars of the day? I don't know. But they would've been hellacious fights.' — Larry Merchant



In our memories, the ones that play out like grainy film loops, Pryor stands in his corner, his eyes narrowed, pointing his glove at an opponent. It's "Hawk Time!" This was his signature pose, and it was chilling. Antonio Cervantes, a very fine junior welterweight titleholder from Colombia, had never seen anything quite like Pryor. Poor Cervantes; he'd enjoyed a long and impressive career only to find himself in Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum, fending off a fighter who came at him like a steam-powered madman. That one ended at 1:47 of the fourth, with Cervantes looking like he'd been mugged and beaten in a parking lot. Pryor was the new WBA king at 140. But the keys to the kingdom weren't his just yet. In fact, he'd never get his hands on them.

The bulwark of Pryor's legend is that the marquee fighters ducked him. That's partly true but not the whole story. Pryor, too, rejected fights, usually on the advice of a lawyer who didn't think the money was right. But what did Pryor know about lawyers and contracts? He was nicknamed "The Hawk," but in the business world he was a pigeon.

In the ring, though, he was pure alpha-dog. He won more than 200 amateur bouts (including one over a young Thomas Hearns) when amateur boxing wasn't so different from the professional style. Pryor was nearly everyone's choice to win Olympic gold at lightweight in 1976, but he lost in the Trials to Howard Davis Jr. So, as the history-making U.S. team of '76 became media darlings, Pryor turned pro, hired pizza chain owner Buddy LaRosa as



his manager and went to work.

Pryor rattled off a couple dozen wins, most in or near Cincinnati, on his way to becoming a regular television attraction. He threw bolo punches, did the Ali shuffle and showed lightning speed along with his power. He could be knocked down, but he'd jump back up, sometimes charging after his opponent before the referee could wipe his gloves. Comparisons were made to Henry Armstrong and Beau Jack, whirlwinds from boxing's glorious past.

"Pryor was a force of nature," said Showtime analyst Steve Farhood. "He was a feared fighter when he first broke in, so much so that he couldn't secure a world title shot at lightweight, which was his true division. We knew nothing of his personal issues back then. That came later."

However, there were hints that his private life might impede his rise to the top. His own fiancee once shot him in the arm. He shrugged it off and married her anyway. In time, we knew Pryor as the most troubled of boxing's many troubled children.

He'd grown up in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, an area of crumbling buildings and crime. The grim atmosphere wasn't lost on his family; the Pryors had their share of trouble, sometimes involving guns and knives. From this environment came Aaron, a lonely kid craving attention. (He took the name "Hawk" after a local businessman, Ken Hawk, had shown him some kindness.) Pryor hoped boxing would bring him love and make him less of an outsider. But it wasn't enough to be a brawler with a tireless engine. He needed an opponent with a name.

Enter Arguello, a genius of sorts who'd won titles in three divisions – only a handful of men had done it at the time – and wanted to be the first to win a fourth. Arguello was a gentleman, a well-mannered and handsome Nicaraguan. A classic boxer with a rapier right hand, he wanted Pryor's junior welterweight belt. By now, Pryor was known for his abrasive entourage of armed bodyguards and slinky women; in comparison to Arguello, he seemed clownish. There were many who thought Arguello would simply outclass him in the ring. They finally met on November 12, 1982, at the Orange Bowl in Miami. Fourteen

At left, Pryor overwhelmed his opponents – including Arguello – by staying on top of them. Below, Pryor (right) served as a mentor to his son Aaron Jr. late in his life.

rounds later, Pryor stood victorious.

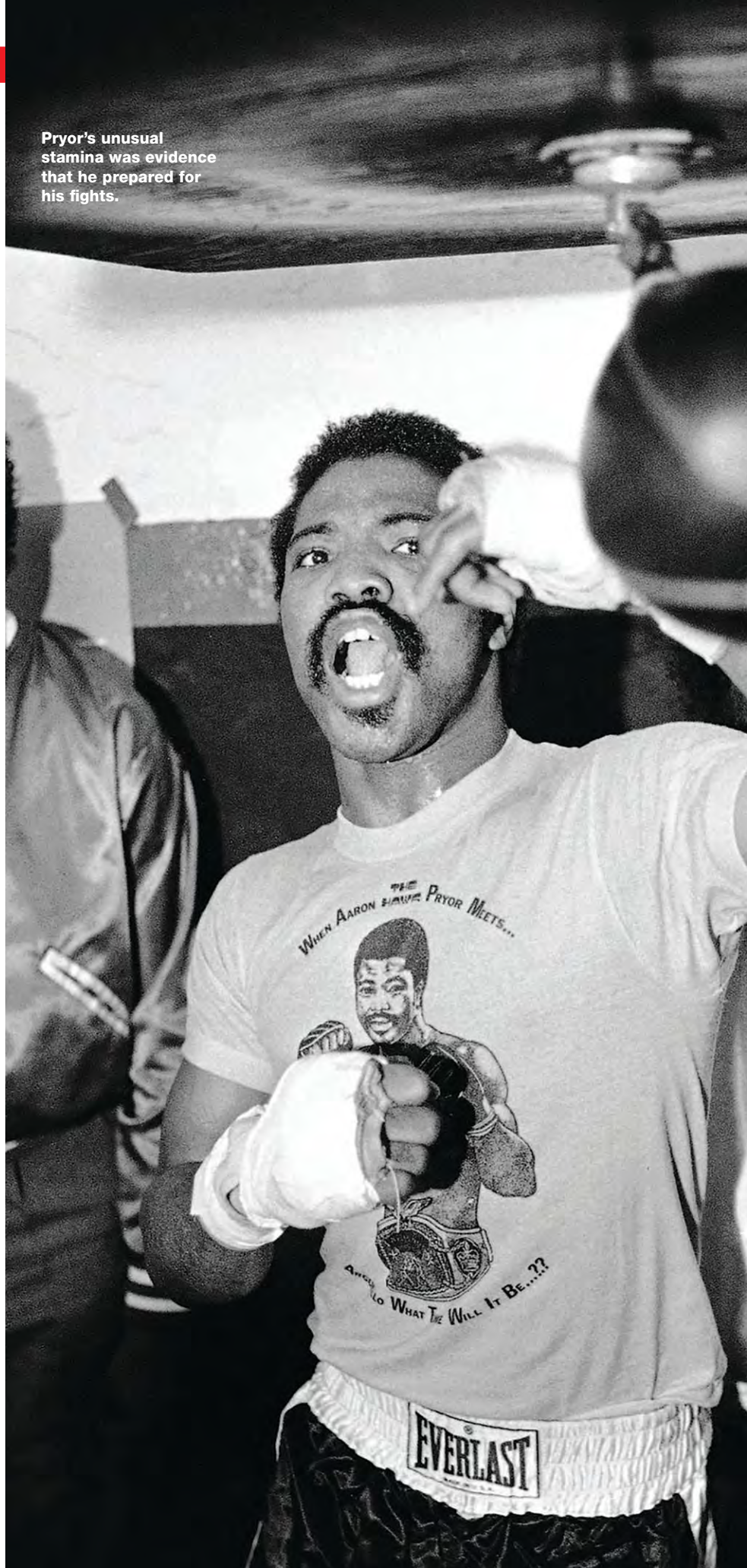
It wasn't easy. Fights aren't dubbed Fight of the Decade by THE RING, as this one was, without a major exchange of firepower. Arguello boxed brilliantly. Pryor would say years later that Arguello hit with such force that, "I could feel the pain before the punches landed." But The Hawk was just brilliant. In the 14th, with Jack Nicholson sitting just a few rows away in rapt attention, Pryor stunned Arguello, drove him into the ropes and connected with a dozen or more unanswered shots. It must've felt to Arguello as if a pack of wolves had been unleashed on him. Finally, the great fighter slumped to the canvas, his dream of a fourth title dashed.

Unfortunately, Pryor's great night was tainted. His trainer, Panama Lewis, could be heard before the 14th round talking about a mysterious bottle, "the one I mixed." Lewis would eventually be banned from working corners after charges of glove tampering, so in retrospect the bottle becomes even more questionable. The Miami boxing commission muddied things further by not seeking post-fight drug tests.

"The black bottle issue wasn't really much of a controversy," said Farhood, "and I think the reason is that nobody wanted it to overshadow the fight, which was so fantastic. It was only in subsequent months and years that it became a big mystery."

A rematch was made, this time in Las Vegas, this time without Lewis. This time Pryor stopped Arguello in 10. The Hawk had effectively faced down his accusers and torn out their tongues.

Rather than step into the limelight, Pryor rode this emphatic victory straight into a freefall of drugs and strange behavior. Some said he was depressed because beating Arguello hadn't made him into a household name. Others felt he was simply waylaid by the same cocaine blizzard that ruined dozens of athletes during the hard-partying 1980s. Still others claimed Pryor was simply trusting the



Pryor's unusual stamina was evidence that he prepared for his fights.

wrong people.

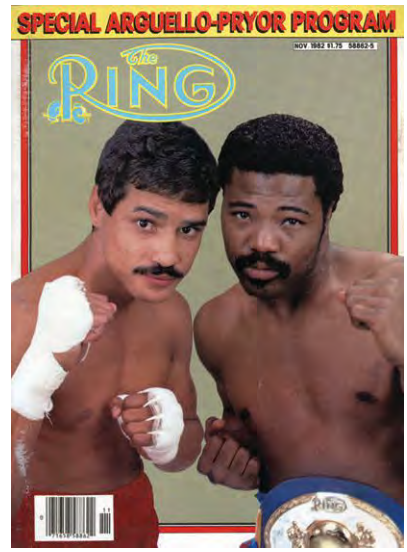
Lawyers, promoters and trainers came and went. So did wives. So did money. Pryor disappeared for more than two years, trying to clean up his act. There were reports of eye problems. Sanctioning bodies stripped him of his titles because of his inactivity. He eventually returned to boxing and met the unheralded Bobby Joe Young in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, only to be stopped in the seventh round. "It's my first loss," Pryor said. "Merry Christmas." Pryor seemed out of his head that night, even scuffling with Young's trainer.

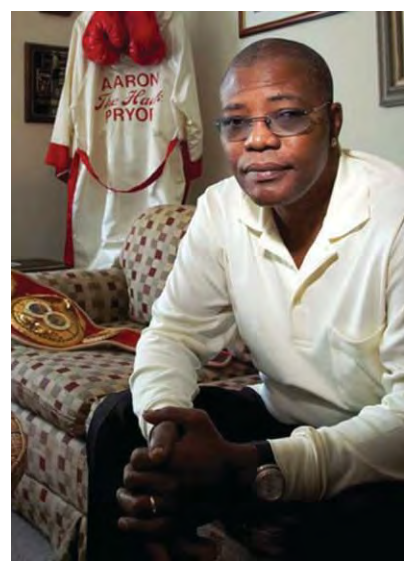
He fought on, bringing his stale routine to any state where he could get a boxing license. Declared legally blind in one eye and now a pudgy welterweight, he finished his career in December 1990 at age 35, beating a little-known opponent at a hotel in Norman, Oklahoma. Then he vanished, like a hurricane blown out to sea. In his absence, he became one of boxings's great "What if?" stories.

"Other fighters have come up short, and had their troubles," said former HBO commentator Larry Merchant, "but what's poignant about Pryor is that he was such a crowd pleaser. He was part of a great era, even if he wasn't one of the elite pillars holding it up. It took a special guy to stand out at the time because Ray Leonard blanketed everything. So Pryor was overshadowed. Certainly, after the Arguello fight he was more of a star, but he never had a huge following. The opportunity was there, but through bad timing, or bad management, he missed it. And fighters of that style don't have a long shelf life. They leave it all in the ring.

"Would he have fared well against the big stars of the day? I don't know. But they would've been hellacious fights."

The dream bouts would remain dreams, while Pryor's nightmare continued. Drugs landed him in a state pen for a short while, but he was soon back on the streets, feeding his addiction. Finally, after collapsing in a crack house with a bleeding ulcer, he decided enough was enough.





Pryor was always tied to Arguello, in good days and bad.

Pryor rallied. He kicked his cocaine habit for good in 1993. He went on to become a public speaker and anti-drug crusader. He kept a hand in boxing, too, training youngsters. Frankie Pryor, wife No. 4, provided support and stability. There's no estimating the positive effect she had on her husband's life.

Gradually, Pryor received his share of honors, including a 1996 induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Though there will always be talk of the career that might've been, it's impressive that so much was accomplished by a man who was always on the verge of unraveling. And in a strange way, the fact that Pryor never fought a Leonard or a Duran or a Mancini adds to his mystique. It leaves us wondering.

As for the bad old days, Pryor talked about them sometimes. But when he told his stories, he never went for laughs or shock value. It was more like disbelief. He talked about how much he'd lost, and he'd tell you that going to church is what saved him. Mostly, he talked about Arguello and their friendship. Some fighters ignored Pryor, but Arguello had the guts to fight him. Pryor never forgot.

That the two couldn't have gone into old age together is a shame. Arguello died by his own hand in 2009. The irony is that Pryor often thought about taking his own life. Of the two, most would've picked Pryor to take that dark route, not Arguello. Like Pryor, Arguello had a cocaine addiction. It appears the two were more alike than anyone knew, which may account for their strong bond.

Still, the best part of Pryor's saga, and we think he'd agree, is that he beat drugs. He found peace. And to rephrase Frank Deford, who said upon Wilt Chamberlain's death that heaven is a place where they don't shoot free throws, heaven for Aaron Pryor will be where the big names won't avoid you and the money will always be right.

Photo by: Ruben Cortez

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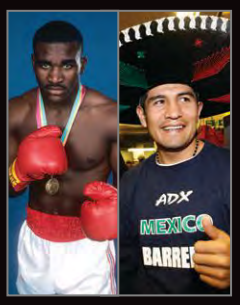
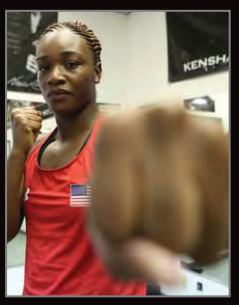
TIME WILL TELL





10 THINGS WE'LL SEE (AND 10 WE WON'T) IN THE COMING YEAR

By **David Greisman**

Whether it is the action in the ring or the business of the sport itself, boxing brings with it a mix of the predictable and the unpredictable. We never would've guessed that Canelo Alvarez would face Amir Khan in 2016. Once it was signed, however, everyone except Khan knew it would end exactly as it did: with Amir down and out. Other storylines we can see coming. It's not hard to tell when fighters are on the rise, which fighters are on a collision course, and who is fading and on the tail end of his career. Some of our predictions for 2017 are based on confirmed facts. Others are merely educated guesses. Stay tuned for our thoughts on how the year will shake out, where we're headed and what will have you shaking your head. »

10 THINGS WE'LL

ROMAN GONZALEZ SUFFERING HIS FIRST PRO LOSS

"Chocolatito" became the best boxer in the sport because of his great skills, speed and power but also because of his desire to take on big challenges. He won titles at 105 and 108, jumped to 112 and beat RING champion **Akira Yaegashi.** Gonzalez moved to 115 in 201 , taking on one of the two best in the division. The result was a clear but competitive victory over Carlos Cuadras. Gonzalez left more marked up than we're used to seeing. He shouldn't be expected to take it any easier in 2017. That's a great thing, but it will eventually put him in too deep against someone who was too big to overwhelm and too much to overcome.

CANELO ALVAREZ VS. GENNADY GOLOVKIN

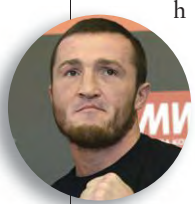
This isn't just wishful thinking in an era when we waited years for Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao to fight and continue to wait for Adonis Stevenson to take part in a truly meaningful light heavyweight fight. The showdown between ineal middleweight champion Canelo Alvarez and Gennady Golovkin will indeed take place toward the end of 2017. It will still take plenty of effort to get there; both sides have been digging in their heels when it comes to the financial split. They'll reach an agreement. After all, there's too much money to make for this fight not to be made.

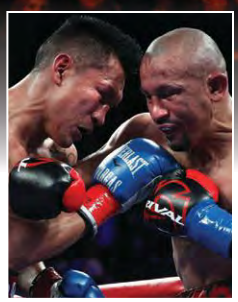
HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE REUNIFICATION

The champion no longer has nearly all of the world titles. Tyson Fury had the three he took from Wladimir Klitschko, was stripped of one and then he vacated the remaining two due to his struggles with mental illness. That left him with only the RING title at our press time. Anthony Joshua has the IBF belt, Deontay Wilder has the WBC and the WBO will belong to the winner of Joseph Parker vs. Andy Ruiz. As fragmented as things now are, Joshua has agreed to face Klitschko for the vacant WBA title in 2017. And if that doesn't happen for some reason, expect Joshua to move toward a unification bout with Wilder instead.

USYK TAKING OVER CRUISERWEIGHT WITH CLASS

Marco Huck was the man at 200, and then he was not. Krzysztof Glowacki stopped Huck, and then he, too, was dethroned. Glowacki was completely outclassed by Oleksandr Usyk this past September, losing a wide decision to the 2012 gold medalist. Usyk's speed and boxing skills were obvious; his superiority at just 10-0 is reminiscent of fellow Ukrainian talent Vasyl Lomachenko. Usyk had a December bout scheduled against Thabiso Mchunu. The top name at cruiserweight right now is **Denis Lebedev,** and even h would be in for a difficult challenge against Usyk.





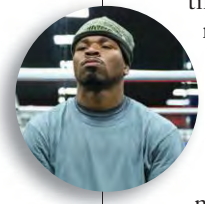
ANOTHER FIGHT OF THE YEAR CANDIDATE AT 130 POUNDS

Orlando Salido went to war with Terdsak Kokietgym in 2014, battled it out twice with Roman Martinez in 2015 and went into the trenches against Francisco Vargas in 2016. Vargas had his excellent brawl with Takashi Miura in 2015 and the Salido fight in 2016. Miura was supposed to face Salido at the end of 2016 until Salido went out with an injury. The junior lightweight division remains one of the most entertaining in the sport, and 2017 will likely bring more of the same with any or all of the above, plus perhaps some combination of Jason Sosa, Vasyl Lomachenko, Nicholas Walters, Jezreel Corrales and Takashi Uchiyama.

SEE IN 2017:

TWO BIG MATCHES AT WELTERWEIGHT

One of these is scheduled: Keith Thurman and Danny Garcia will meet in March to unify their two welterweight titles. Thurman finally established his credentials at 147 with his victory over **Shawn Port**



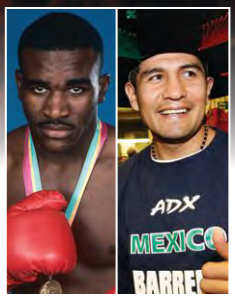
Garcia needs to beat Thurman to do the same; his lone victory of note in the division came against a faded Robert Guerrero. Also possible in 2017 is Kell Brook defending against his mandatory challenger, Errol Spence. Brook seemed to be finished at welterweight after fighting Gennady Golovkin at 160. He says he's not ready to give up his title at 147 just yet, though. Brook-Spence is a top talent against a highly touted contender.

WHETHER FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. IS TRULY RETIRED FOR GOOD

If Mayweather is to come back for one more fight, then 2017 would have to be the year. At 40 years old, he could still return after more than 18 months out of the ring and perform at a high enough level to beat the other top welterweights, including Manny Pacquiao. But if this coming year passes without a Mayweather comeback, then he will truly have settled happily into his new life, focusing his energy on being a promoter and manager and spending more time with his children.

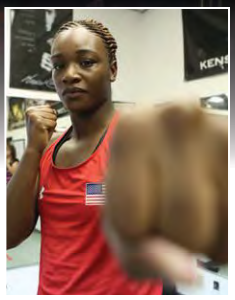
ADRIEN BRONER GETTING IN TROUBLE ONCE AGAIN

Sad, but true.



HOLYFIELD AND BARRERA ENSHRINED IN CANASTOTA

There were two obvious choices on the International Boxing Hall of Fame ballots sent out in October: former cruiserweight and heavyweight champion Evande Holyfield and former featherweight champion and 122- and 130-pound titleholder Marco Antonio Barrera. Holyfield was already a shoo-in two decades ago, except his career meandered on long past its expiration date until his final fight in 2011. And even then he didn't officially retire until 2014. Barrera also last laced up his gloves in 2011 for the second victory of a two-bout comeback. Each was certain to be named to the Hall when the announcement went out in December, after we went to press.



WOMEN'S BOXING GETTING MORE EXPOSURE

It's been a long time since the days of Christy Martin and Laila Ali. While female fighters have been in the spotlight in other countries in recent years, that has not been the case in the United States. Aside from **Heather Hardy**

taking part in an NBC Sports Network show in August, women are almost never aired. But the 2016 Olympics is helping to change that. Claressa Shields, fresh off her second gold and plenty of publicity, made her pro debut on the free telecast before the Sergey Kovalev-Andre Ward pay-per-view. Over in the United Kingdom, another two-time gold medalist in Nicola Adams was set to turn pro. Katie Taylor, who won gold in 2012 for Ireland, made the transition in October.

10 THINGS WE WON'T

FEMALE FIGHTERS IN A TV MAIN EVENT IN THE U.S. OR U.K.

The increased exposure for women's boxing may land the aforementioned Olympians in the headlines, but it won't land them in the headlining fights on television just yet in the United States and United Kingdom. It' too early in their careers for a match compelling enough to be a main event And if boxing's powers-that-be haven't yet bestowed that honor on the female fighters who are more accomplished and deeper into their careers, it's not going to happen to them now either. That's a shame. Mixed martial arts and pro wrestling broke that glass ceiling. For now, you have to look online for the good fights involving female boxers taking place overseas.

MORE BOXERS BRAVELY FOLLOWING CARL FRAMPTON'S LEAD

In 2016, Frampton went straight from fighting one of the top 122-pounders in Scott Quigg to meeting and beating one of the best 126-pounders in **Leo Santa Cruz.**

He's following that victory over Santa Cruz with an immediate rematch.

Meanwhile, other boxers remain content taking long breaks between bouts, returning to shake off the rust against easy opponents and only taking on significant challenges every once in a while. What Frampton has done is commendable. What too many of the rest tend to prefer is pitiful.

ROY JONES JR. GETTING KNOCKED OUT AGAIN

You would've thought that the message would've been hammered into Jones' head by now after the knockout losses, particularly after he was flattened by Enzo Maccarinelli at the end of 2015. Instead, Jones kept at it in his diminished state, only considering retirement after tearing his biceps in a victory over some dude named Rodney Moore last August. As sad as it is that he might fight on after his 48th birthday in January, the good news is that Jones doesn't have much name value anymo We may see him against lesser foes, thankfully not against anyone more dangerous.

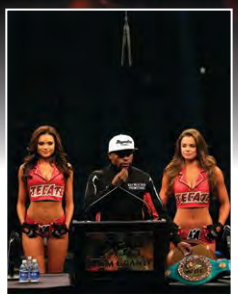
TERENCE CRAWFORD MOVING UP TO WELTERWEIGHT

Crawford became the true junior welterweight champion when he easily outpointed Viktor Postol. He's not done at 140, even if there are many more bigger names at 147. He was scheduled to defend against John Molina in December and then was aiming to unify with the two other titleholders: Eduard Troyanovsky and a man Crawford already beat down at lightweight, Ricky Burns. Even a fight with Manny Pacquiao would most likely be at 140, as would a potential clash with **Adrien Broner.**

LUIS ORTIZ GETTING THE TITLE SHOT HE DESERVES

Ortiz's move from Golden Boy Promotions to Matchroom Boxing means he is no longer limited by network allegiances as he was when he was waiting on the winner of the Tyson Fury-Wladimir Klitschko rematch on HBO. Now he can fight Anthony Joshua or Deontay Wilder on Showtime as well. Unfortunately for Ortiz, neither of those heavyweight fights seems likely for 2017. Joshua had Eric Molina scheduled for December 2016 and then was hoping to face Klitschko next. Wilder will come back from injury and then owes a fight to the Bermane Stiverne-Alexander Povetkin winner. And the Joseph Parker vs. Andy Ruiz victor will likely aim for less risk and more reward than they would get against Ortiz.

SEE IN 2017:



THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW PAY-PER-VIEW STAR

There were two big pay-per-views in 2015 — Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Manny Pacquiao and Miguel Cotto vs. Canelo Alvarez — and none that did blockbuster numbers in 2016. Even stalwart superstars like Pacquiao and Canelo aren't approaching the types of numbers that used to come with fighters of their stature. That won't change in 2017, at least not in the U.S. The winner of Sergey Kovalev vs. Andre Ward won't become must-buy television. Neither will Gennady Golovkin, no matter how popular he already is. The biggest rising pay-per-view draw for now is Anthony Joshua, who sells well in the United Kingdom.

ANOTHER MIDDLEWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER AGAINST A WELTERWEIGHT

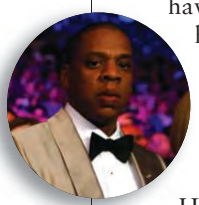
Just because the last two lineal middleweight champions have been a pair of natural junior middleweights doesn't mean that the current crop of 147-pounders can also compete. As good as Kell Brook is, he's no Sugar Ray Robinson or Sugar Ray Leonard. And as muc heart and guts as **Amir Khan** has, he's no Kell Brook. Khan's loss to Canelo Alvarez and Brook's defeat against Gennady Golovkin were predictable. They also were unnecessary, happening only because of the money those matches would generate. Just because a fight makes dollars doesn't mean it makes sense.

REAL PROGRESS MADE ON FIGHTER SAFETY

Boxing is a dangerous sport. That will never change. But fighters aren't the only ones who should be defending themselves at all times. The many athletic commissions vary when it comes to which medical procedures boxers must undergo before they fight. Too many dangerous mismatches are still allowed. Too many boxers whose best days are past them still get permission to lace 'em up. With so much attention being given to the aftermath of concussions in football, the sport of boxing is too disorganized and too disinterested to give a damn.

A RAPPER EXCELLING AS A BOXING PROMOTER

50 Cent thought he would be running TMT Promotions alongside his friend Floyd Mayweather Jr., only to start SMS Promotions on his own. SMS is done. **Jay Z's** Roc Nation Boxing isn't doing much. Roc Nation has bigger names than SMS ever did. Guillermo Rigondeaux was difficult to promote even when he was with Top Rank. Miguel Cotto says he is entering his final year in the sport. Andre Ward was the lone name with a big fight in 2016. The rest of Roc Nation's roster consists of a handful of prospects. The other top fighters and up-and-comers prefer to go with promoters who have TV dates and established credentials.



CONOR MCGREGOR IN A PRO BOXING MATCH

Part of what makes McGregor such a great mixed martial artist is his hand speed and boxing ability. There's a big difference between having good hands in the octagon and having good hands in the ring. He'd never be able to compete at a high level in boxing, which is the only level at which he would want to fight in order to make as much money as he does in the UFC. There's no shame in that. Boxers can't compete at a high level in MMA either. McGregor is a huge star in his own sport. Neither he nor the UFC will risk that.

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

THE FIGHTS RING CONTRIBUTORS WANT – AND DON'T WANT – TO SEE IN 2017

MITCH ABRAMSON

Want to see:
Errol Spence vs. Keith Thurman
Why: The two have traded a lot of trash talk. The gifted Spence is getting better with each fight; Thurman showed his talent in an exciting win against Shawn Porter. This matchup would pit the top two welterweights against one another, which is how it should be.

Don't want to see:
Tyson Fury vs. Wladimir Klitschko II
Why: The first fight could be shown to prisoners as a form of punishment. There was more drama between rounds in the corners than in the actual fight. Their styles preclude an exciting fight. Klitschko is too old and Fury is too, well, depleted from all the personal turmoil.

RON BORGES

Want to see:
Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin
Why: This is the closest we will come to a great middleweight title fight any time soon if these guys are who they claim to be. It also will answer lingering questions about the legitimacy of Golovkin, which remains in doubt after the Kell Brook fight and until he beats someone the public has heard of.

Don't Want To See:
Tyson Fury vs. Wladimir Klitschko II
Why: Tyson Fury can't fight a little bit. He didn't so much win the first fight as was the beneficiary of Klitschko's steep decline. Things seldom end well for 40-year-old former champions.

Everyone wants to see this collision.

GARETH A DAVIES

Want to see:
Carl Frampton vs. Leo Santa Cruz II
Why: The first fight was so good, the styles so perfectly suited for one another, that we can relish the second installment. They could engage in 10 fights and eight would be Fight of the Year contenders. Can't wait to see the rematch in January.

Don't want to see:
Anthony Crolla vs. Jorge Linares II
Why: I'm a huge fan of Million Dollar Crolla, but I would rather have seen him fight Terry Flanagan. They went to the same school in Manchester and support rival football teams; it's a great fight. Disappointment for the boxing fans and industry in the U.K.

BERNARD FERNANDEZ

Want to see: Anthony Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder, Joseph Parker, Wladimir Klitschko, Luis Ortiz or a rehabbed Tyson Fury.
Why: Joshua is looking more and more like a young Lennox Lewis. Any of the aforementioned names would provide him with the true test he needs to pass for full legitimacy. We've had world title fights involving lesser lights like Charles Martin, Eric Molina and Alex Leapai recently. Enough, already.

Don't want to see:
Shane Mosley vs. anybody
Why: More grasps at the elusive brass ring by one of my favorite fighters of the not-that-distant past, Mosley, still fighting on at 45. He replaces another well-faded former great, Roy Jones Jr., on my please-save-yourself-from-yourself list.

DOUG FISCHER

Want to see:
Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin
Why: It's the biggest boxing event that can be made in which the matchup will deliver an entertaining fight. If the anticipated middleweight championship were to land at AT&T Stadium in Texas, it could attract 100,000 fans.

Don't want to see:
Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Manny Pacquiao II
Why: At this stage of the future Hall of Famers' careers (and tired rivalry) the only reason for a rematch is to try to (once again) swindle a naive public. Good luck to them. However, if you're a real boxing fan, Mayweather-Pacquiao II is a complete waste of time.

NORM FRAUENHEIM

Want to see:
Vasyl Lomachenko vs. Mikey Garcia
Why: Not sure anyone

can overcome – or offset – the blend of creativity and fundamental skill Lomachenko has displayed in his rapid ascendancy. But the poised, tactically proficient Garcia might have as good a chance as anyone, probably at lightweight or junior welterweight.

Don't want to see: Guillermo Rigondeaux vs. anybody
Why: Unbeaten and unwatchable. The second of those observations has consigned Rigondeaux to the most forgotten corner of a shelf avoided by rivals and fans. He is a gold-medal talent. But his skill is a solo act, a singular style hard to beat and impossible to like.

THOMAS GERBASI

Want to see: Deontay Wilder vs. Anthony Joshua
Why: Sure, Klitschko is still around, Fury and Haye are lurking and any number of faceless pretenders want their shot at the gold. But the only heavyweight fight worth seeing is between these top two big men, who could kick off a nice series that would keep us enthralled for years.

Don't want to see: Canelo Alvarez vs. anybody not named Gennady Golovkin
Why: I have no doubt that Alvarez wants to fight GGG as soon as possible. So let's cut out the "marination" process and get it done. No more tune-ups. We need to see THE fight of 2017.

TOM GRAY

Want to see: Roman Gonzalez vs. Juan Francisco Estrada II
Why: If you saw the first fight, then you know why. Two complete fighters in a rerun of one of the most enthralling battles we've witnessed in the last 10 years. Both are now operating at 115 pounds, so the timing is perfect.

Don't want to see: Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Manny Pacquiao II
Why: I was in Las Vegas for their first fight and left the playground of the world feeling like a child who had lost his favorite toy. Like most fans, I was crushed by that anti-climax and have no desire to see it again.

DAVID GREISMAN

Want to see: Deontay Wilder vs. Anthony Joshua
Why: Two undefeated titleholders whose positive attributes make them promising but who still need to be tested against the top tier of heavyweights. Someone's getting knocked out in this fight, and with two belts on the line, one of these towering talents will stand even taller afterward.

Don't want to see: Canelo Alvarez vs. anyone else in fall 2017
Why: This is conditioned on Alvarez and Gennady Golovkin still being undefeated by the time the second half of the year comes around. Their fight is one we've been waiting on and shouldn't wait for any longer. Canelo facing anyone other than GGG would be a massive disappointment.

ANDREAS HALE

Want To See: Errol Spence vs. Terence Crawford
Why: A pair of ridiculously talented ring tacticians who are able to adjust on the fly, Crawford and Spence are about as close as you can get to Floyd Mayweather Jr. What separates them from "Money" inside of the ring is that both appear to be more interested in closing the show, which could deliver a special fight if they met at 147 pounds.

Don't Want To See: Tyson Fury vs. Wladimir Klitschko II
Why: Didn't you see the first one? Nothing would change aside from the fact that Fury may or may not be using cocaine heading into the fight. This is a rematch that nobody really wants to see.

BRIAN HARTY

Want to see: Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin
Why: It would be a legitimately huge event and a potentially great fight between two very talented, hard-punching middleweights – the keyword being "middleweights." Hopefully both sides will agree to as pure a contest as possible with a minimum of catchweight wrangling.

Don't want to see: Andre Ward vs. Sergey Kovalev II
Why: I don't care who won the first fight. Ward is very skilled at what he does, but given 10 chances to watch any fighter I'd choose "not Ward" 10 times and ask for an 11th just to be sure.

STEVE KIM

Wants to see: Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin
Why: Quite simply, it's the biggest fight that can be made in boxing today (that pits two marquee fighters in their prime). And unlike other "superfights" it's one that actually has a chance to deliver upon its promises in terms of action and drama.

Don't want to see: Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Manny Pacquiao II
Why: The first fight was incredibly lucrative but did great damage to the sport and business of boxing as it was a complete dud. It was the very definition of overselling and underdelivering. And what really changes the second time around?

DON STRADLEY

Want to see: Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz
Why: With Tyson Fury on mental leave and the aging Wlad Klitschko on his way out, it would be beneficial to see these two bangers put on a display of fireworks. The winner of Wilder-Ortiz would be in a position to claim the division as his own.

Don't want to see: Amir Khan vs. anybody
Why: Khan has some skills and can probably beat a lot of fighters, but his career has taken on a predictable pattern. He'll win a few, then get knocked out. Win a few more, get knocked out again. We don't need to see the cycle repeat itself.

ELLIOT WORSELL

Want to see: Carl Frampton vs. Lee Selby
Why: I've long considered Frampton and Selby two of the most talented fighters in Britain and Ireland and now they're both at featherweight and packing a title. Take it to Belfast, prepare for the noise and watch as their styles mesh for a hell of a scrap.

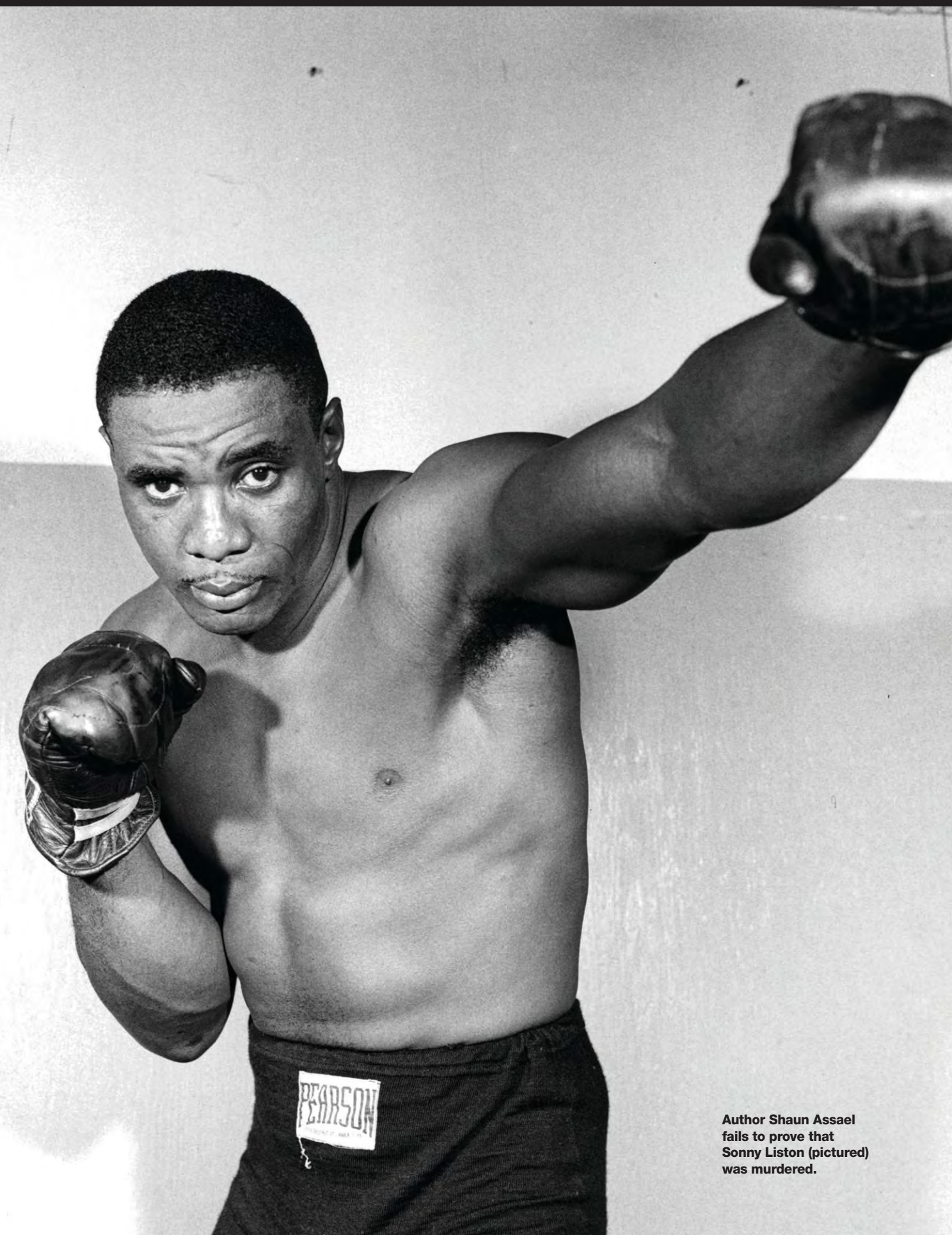
Don't want to see: Tyson Fury vs. Wladimir Klitschko II
Why: It was a fascinating rematch when first scheduled for July. It was then mildly interesting when moved to October. Now, though, a year on from their first fight, which was hardly a classic, the controversial Fury-Klitschko saga has run its course.

ANSON WAINWRIGHT

Want to see: Roman Gonzalez vs. Naoya Inoue
Why: A can't-miss, all-action fight between two of the best little guys in the business. Both men have elite pound-for-pound talent. Hopefully their paths will cross in 2017.

Don't want to see: The top middleweights – Canelo Alvarez, Daniel Jacobs, Billy Joe Saunders and Chris Eubank Jr. – avoiding Gennady Golovkin
Why: For too long now the so-called top 160-pounders have talked the talk but failed to walk the walk. First Felix Sturm, then Sergio Martinez, Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., Miguel Cotto and now the aforementioned quartet all see the Kazakhstani destroyer as too much risk vs. reward.

By **Thomas Hauser**



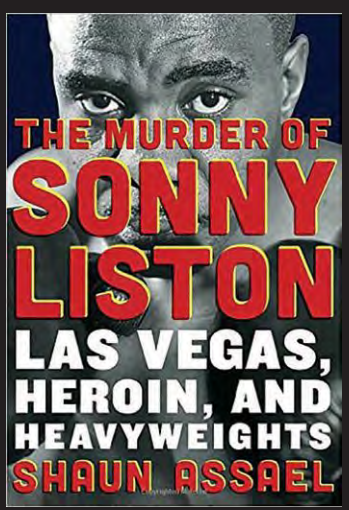
Author Shaun Assael fails to prove that Sonny Liston (pictured) was murdered.

HIT AND MISS

SONNY LISTON BOOK IS WELL-WRITTEN AND COMPELLING BUT FACTUAL ERRORS DAMAGE ITS CREDIBILITY

"THE MURDER OF SONNY LISTON: Las Vegas, Heroin, and Heavyweights"
By Shaun Assael

On January 5, 1971, Sonny Liston's wife returned home from a holiday trip to St. Louis and found her husband's rotting corpse in the bedroom of their Las Vegas home. The official autopsy report concluded that Liston died of natural causes (heart and lung congestion). An equally plausible view is that he died from an overdose of heroin. "The Murder of Sonny Liston" by Shaun Assael (Blue Rider Press) takes things a step further and argues that, whether or not Liston died from an overdose, he was murdered (most likely by a rogue cop in the service of the Las Vegas mob).



According to Assael, Liston worked as a collection agent for the mob in Las Vegas in the late 1960s. He was also a go-between for moving cocaine (and possibly heroin) in the Keno room at The International Hotel in Las Vegas.

"Every so often," Assael writes, "a manager or a dealer would send someone over whom he would make eye contact with. At the bar or in the bathroom or in a leather chair in the lounge, the former heavyweight champion would unfurl his gigantic hand and inside would be cocaine."

At this point, a skeptic might ask, "I thought drug dealers are supposed to be inconspicuous. Do you really want a former heavyweight champion (whom everyone in the room is likely to be looking at) handing out cocaine?"

Assael also writes that Liston was a heavy cocaine user and later became addicted to heroin, an escalating habit that led to the concomitant loosening of his tongue. He then speculates that Liston had taken a dive in his second fight against Muhammad Ali in exchange for a promise from the Nation of Islam that Sonny and his mob backers would receive a percentage of Ali's purses for the rest of Ali's ring career. Then, prior to Ali-Frazier I (which was contested on March 8, 1971), Liston began to talk openly about being owed money and was murdered to ensure his silence.

In that regard, Assael declares, "Here he was, hustling fifty-dollar bags of coke to support himself. And every time he heard another dollar figure thrown around about the Ali-Frazier fight, he got moodier. Some very powerful people might have started to worry that Sonny was talking too much about the money he was going to get from Ali ... too much for his – and their – own good."

Assael writes smoothly. His tale is woven together in entertaining fashion, presents a compelling personal portrait of Liston and offers an interesting look at Las Vegas during a time of transition from a mob-run town with corrupt law-enforcement authorities to a sleeker, more corporate-like model.

There are elements of humor, such as the story about a middle-aged woman who approached Liston while he was playing blackjack at the Frontier and exclaimed, "You're Sonny Liston."

"Yeah, I knew that," Liston told her.

But there are problems with "The Murder of Sonny Liston." The book is billed as investigative reporting. The foundation for good investigative reporting is an accurate recounting of facts.

I know very little about law enforcement in Las Vegas during the period in question. Thus, the assumption I would normally make is that Assael's recitation of facts is accurate, and I'd evaluate his theories accordingly.

However, I know a great deal about Muhammad Ali and boxing. And "The Murder of Sonny Liston" is so plagued by factual errors in these areas that it erodes confidence in the foundation for Assael's broader conspiracy theories.

For example ...

Assael downplays Cassius Clay's victory over

RING MAGAZINE

Sonny Liston in their first encounter by saying that Liston "needed cortisone treatments for bursitis in both shoulders the day before the fight," and that "after the furious pounding he gave Clay, Sonny could barely raise his left arm."

I'm unaware of credible evidence regarding the above-referenced cortisone treatments. As for the "furious pounding" that Liston administered to Clay, a review of the fight (which is available on YouTube) shows that there was none.

Assael states that Ali-Liston II was contested in Lewiston, Maine, in a venue with "fifty thousand seats." In reality, St. Dominic's Arena was able to accommodate 5,000 fans.

Assael also writes that Ali received a draft notice in 1963 but "showed up for his medical exam acting so crazy that he got classified as 1-Y."

That's simply wrong.

To set the record straight, on January 24, 1964, Cassius Clay reported to the Armed Forces Induction Center in Coral Gables, Florida, for a military qualifying examination. He easily passed the physical portion of the exam, but the 50-minute mental aptitude (IQ) test was another matter. Ali had always tested poorly in school. Here, the result was an Army IQ score of 78, which put him in the 16th percentile, well below the passing grade of 30. As a result, he was reclassified 1-Y ("not qualified under current standards for service in the armed forces").

Assael then writes, "As his star continued to climb, the draft board kept an eye on him. In 1967, he suddenly found himself bumped up to 1-A, which made him immediately eligible to serve."

That's misleading. In truth, in early 1966, with manpower needs for the war in Vietnam growing, the mental-aptitude percentile required for induction into the U.S. military was lowered from 30 to 15, rendering Ali (and hundreds of thousands of other young men who had previously been classified 1-Y) eligible for the draft.

Writing about Ali vs. Oscar Bonavena, Assael declares that Ali "gave him a thunderous straight-ahead jab" in the 15th round and, "before the crowd could process what had happened, Bonavena staggered like someone who'd been shot unknowingly from a distance and fallen."

It wasn't a jab. It was a classic left hook. There's a difference.

Assael also writes that Liston outweighed Leotis Martin (who dealt Liston the final loss of his ring career) by 10 pounds. Two paragraphs later, he says it was 20 pounds. This does not inspire confidence in Assael's investigative reporting.

Facts matter.

Assael also has the tendency to disregard information that interferes with his explanation of events.

For example, referring to the end of Round 4 and Round 5 of Liston-Clay I (when Clay was temporarily blinded by a caustic solution), Assael writes, "The cause of the burning was probably liniment oil, though where it came from was the subject of great debate. It could have accidently dripped into Clay's eyes from one of the towels that his trainers were using or, if it came from Sonny's gloves as Clay's camp suspected, it could have been the result of accidental spillage and not a dirty trick."

Let's be honest.

Jack McKinney of the Philadelphia Daily News is described by Assael as "one of the few reporters who was able to get close to Sonny." McKinney later said of that night, "The problems Clay had with his vision in the first Liston fight were no accident. The two toughest opponents that Liston faced prior to Clay were Eddie Machen and Cleveland Williams. Machen lost a 12-round decision to Liston and complained afterward that he'd been bothered by an astringent in his eyes. But he'd fought so poorly that no one believed him. Everyone thought it was just an alibi. And Cleveland Williams gave Liston all kinds of trouble in the first round. I was at that fight, and after the first round there seemed to be a lot confusion in Sonny's corner. In fact, he was late coming out for the second round because his mouthpiece wasn't in. He knocked Williams out in that round. And after the fight, Williams was obviously having trouble seeing. He kept rubbing his eyes. Later on, I kidded Sonny's cornerman, Joe Polino, who was responsible for the mouthpiece, about the confusion. Joe told me, 'Someday I'll explain it to you.' Well, I got my explanation at the first Clay-Liston fight. If you look at a film of what went on in Liston's corner between the third and fourth rounds of that fight, you'll see Polino in the ring with Willie Reddish (Liston's trainer) standing behind him, blocking everyone else's view. And Polino is at Sonny's knees, rubbing something on his gloves."

"The Murder of Sonny Liston" contains a lot of anecdotal material about big names from the world of politics and entertainment. But again, reliability is an issue. For example, Assael references an incident when Carl Cohen (a vice president at the Sands) punched Frank Sinatra in the mouth. But that incident is recounted differently and more reliably by James Kaplan in volume two of his definitive biography of Sinatra.

At one point, Assael references law enforcement authorities utilizing "a covert automated tracking system, a shoe-box-size device that fit in a vehicle's car." This leaves a reader wondering whether anyone proofread the manuscript.

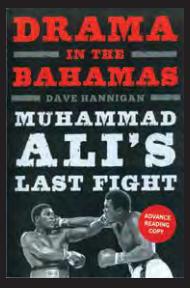
In a similar vein, writing about Ali-Jerry Quarry I, Assael states, "Quarry had trained to anticipate Ali's ten-inch range." That's an incoherent sentence. And if Assael meant "ten-inch reach advantage," that number is wrong.

One might add that anonymous posts in chatroom threads (which are

among the puzzle pieces that Assael puts together) are not reliable sources.

Is it possible that Sonny Liston was murdered? Yes. But "The Murder of Sonny Liston" doesn't prove it.

★★★★



"DRAMA IN THE BAHAMAS: Muhammad Ali's Last Fight"
By Dave Hannigan

On December 11, 1981, the man who was arguably the greatest boxer in history ended his ring career with a 10-round loss in a dilapidated ballpark adjacent to a cow pasture in the Bahamas. "Drama in the Bahamas" by Dave Hannigan (Sports Publishing) tells the story of that sad night, the events leading up to it and the players involved.

After Ali's listless performance in an October 2, 1980, knockout defeat at the hands of Larry Holmes, the assumption was – at last, thank God – he would never fight again. But soon, Ali was saying, "Ain't this something. One bad day on the job and they want to fire me. I'm not just some Negro off the street. I'm the most controversial fighter in history. I want to be free to make my own decisions. If I stop, it's because I want to stop. Nobody's going to make me stop."

That set the stage for 39-year-old Muhammad Ali – the conqueror of Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman – vs. Trevor Berbick.

Berbick, 27, was a solid but limited fighter with an erratic persona. He was born in Jamaica but later moved to Montreal. Fellow Canadian George Chuvalo called him "a bit wacky."

The first obstacle Hannigan faced in writing "Drama in the Bahamas" was that it's hard to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. And Ali-Berbick was a sow's ear. That said, Hannigan's work is a smoothly written, full account of the making and promotion of Ali-Berbick, the financial machinations surrounding the venture and the fight itself.

Ali's deteriorating physical condition is a recurring theme throughout the book. Each of the first 12 chapters is prefaced by a quote from Ali, spoken at various times between 1971 and 1979, announcing his retirement from boxing.

By the time Ali-Berbick rolled around, retirement was an imperative and the warning signs were flashing in red lights.

Ali's longtime ring physician, Ferdie Pacheco (who refused to work with Ali subsequent to Ali vs. Earnie Shavers in 1977), declared, "Ali looks smooth and unmarked on the outside. But if you look inside, you would see a terrible picture. No man can take as much punishment to his head and body as he has over the last twenty years without incurring tremendous damage."

Will Grimsley of the Associated Press reported on Ali at the kick-off press conference for Ali-Berbick as follows: "He stood on the dais, all polished and spruced up like an antique car, the relic he is. Kick his tires and the wheels shimmy. Raise the hood and the engine is a mess of pipes and tubes, bent and rusty. Turn the key and you get a labored chug."

Reporting on the same press conference, Hugh McIlvanney of The Observer wrote, "He continues to recite the commentary for an epic, but what we are seeing is a cruel cartoon. Muhammad Ali can still preach and philosophize, boast and charm and predict. What he can't do is fight."

Things got worse when the promotion moved to the Bahamas. Legendary trainer Eddie Futch was on site with Ernie Singletary, who was scheduled to face Thomas Hearns on the undercard. Futch watched Ali train for four rounds and declared, "It was slow motion. The jab had no snap. He didn't move. Four rounds of nothing, and he was wore out. It's like a pair of socks. When the elastic goes, it's gone. Throw the socks away. You can't fix the elastic. The reflexes are the elastic in your body. If it's gone, it's gone."

Ali's longtime publicist and jack-of-all-trades Harold Conrad likened the limousine convoy of Ali's entourage to the arena on fight night to a funeral cortege.

There was chaos at the arena. The promoters had neglected to arrange for a ring bell. One was hastily removed from around the neck of a cow that was grazing in a nearby pasture. They had also forgotten to order gloves. Fortunately, several pairs were available. Undercard fighters were told not to cut the laces off at the end of a bout so their gloves could be reused later in the evening. Four of nine scheduled undercard fights were canceled at the last minute for financial reasons.

The main event was an ugly mess. Ali was tired by the second round and took a pounding for the next eight. Only his heart and Berbick's limitations enabled Ali to survive. Afterward, McIlvanney wrote, "Graceful exits are rare in professional boxing. But few great champions have gone out more miserably."

Ali's physical condition is his final years is a matter of record. Berbick had his own sad end. In 2007, he was beaten to death by his nephew and an accomplice in an act of premeditated murder. RING

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

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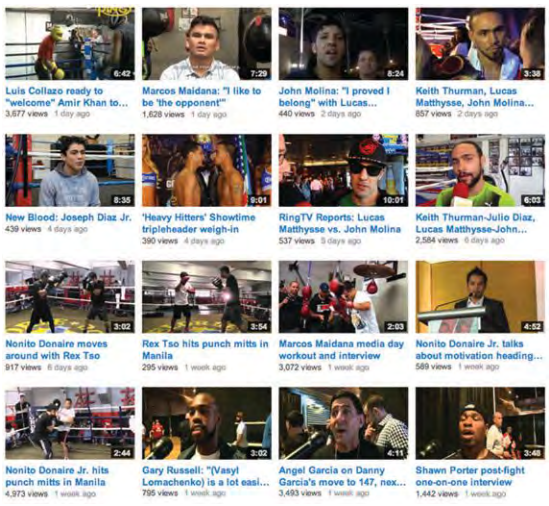

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By Gareth A Davies

The Walsh brothers (left to right, Liam, Michael and Ryan) are already passing on their fighting heritage to the next generation.

FIGHTING ON

THE WALSH BROTHERS MAINTAIN THE LEGACY OF THEIR LATE FATHER

The fighting Walsh brothers were born into this. Michael, Liam and Ryan have been boxing for as long as they've been able to talk and walk and have livened up professional boxing events in the U.K. since 2008, the year they all turned pro. Often appearing on fight cards together, cheered to the rafters by their sizable "Farmy Army" – a legion of rowdy fans from Norfolk, England, who follow them everywhere – the Walshes have experienced contrasting fortunes as pros but have solidarity and surnames in common.

It is, they say, what gives them an edge over the competition. Strength in numbers.

"My dad told me on your own you're good, together you're all right, but the three of you are invincible," said Ryan, the British featherweight champion. "This is our triangle."

The Walsh triangle was established

and strengthened during their formative years, when each was wide-eyed and impressionable, as their father, John, raised them not on school textbooks but on fight tapes. Together, they'd sit around the living room and binge-watch the likes of Sugar Ray Leonard and Marvin Hagler in action.

Each of the boys was then assigned their personal go-to style template: Liam would be the boxer, so he'd watch pure boxers. Ryan would be the counterpuncher, so he'd gorge on counterpunchers. And Michael, the most naturally aggressive of the three, was destined, his father believed, to be an all-action slugger, so he familiarized himself with a variety of pressure-fighters.

Standing punch-bags were purchased as soon as the boys were able to stand, and Michael, the oldest child, happily led the way. "I had to box Liam and Ryan on my knees," he says. "I had to get on my knees with knee pads, which I got for Christmas, because they were proper little girls. I'd beat them up easily. I'd make them cry."

Twins Liam and Ryan, both 30, now all grown up and titleholders in their own right, offer a slightly different version of events. "As a youngster, Michael was very, very strong," admits Liam, the reigning Commonwealth junior lightweight champion and former British champion. "Even as a 7-year-old at school he'd knock kids clean out. It was shocking for a 7-year-old. He was stupidly strong. We were a little weak at that age. We are two years younger. We used to spar but it would be two-on-one and our dad would make him go on his knees. My dad also told him another thing. He said, 'One day those two will get older and bigger than you and it will all come back round.'"

That day is today. Michael fell victim to questionable lifestyle choices, ill-discipline and injury and decided to cut short his career at the age of 32. He bowed out with a record of 11-0 (11 knockouts). Liam and Ryan, meanwhile, remain on course to win big titles in the near future. Ryan recently came up short in a European featherweight title shot against Dennis Ceylan – dropping a split-decision in Denmark – and Liam, undefeated in 21 bouts, is in line for a shot at IBF 130-pound titleholder Jose Pedraza. A classy, measured shot-picker with real composure, Liam owes much of his success to his family's immersive approach.

"I'd like to think a lot of my improvements are down to self-studying," he says. "Watching a fight, breaking it down, watching it again, watching training clips, watching interviews. As a professional boxer, it should be a must. That is your job, your professional career. You should study the sport and educate yourself on the business. Yet there are a lot of fighters out there who say, 'Nah, I don't watch it, don't care about boxing.' I just think you're not giving yourself the best chance to improve. There are many champions of yesteryear you should be watching and saying, 'How did he become champion? What route did he take? What's his style like?'"

John Walsh died in 2011 at the age of 49 following a brief battle with heart disease. The boys' mother, Michelle, lost her husband and best friend, while Liam, Ryan, Michael and their sister, Emma, lost their mentor. They carried on, though. Such was the groundwork their father provided, so deep were his lessons, both in terms of boxing and life in general, the boys stayed together, grew even tighter and vowed to do the one thing they said they'd do – win him a world championship belt. Better than that, the Walsh brothers learned from their father's mistakes, heeded his advice and have continued his legacy.

"We're taking the right steps," says Ryan (21-2-1, 10 KOs). "My boys are sparring right now. All our boys are, to be fair. Liam has got a 5-year-old. I've got a 10-year-old and a 7-year-old. Michael has got a 3-year-old. They all put the gloves on. My oldest is on his knees at the moment doing exactly what Michael was doing. But we tell the younger ones, 'Don't worry, you'll one day grow up to be bigger,' just as our dad told us."

FOREMAN: THE POWER OF THE MIC

Tyson Fury is a product of boxing. He was brought up on it and has come to rely on it. It's why so many worry for him at this present time – without titles, without boxing, without purpose. We have been warned of his ways when the lights dim and there's no fight on the horizon. Peter, his uncle and trainer, has told us how Fury can become out of sorts and depressed, how he struggles to find reasons to get out of bed in the morning, how he needs the sport.

George Foreman was another one who needed boxing. Another one who couldn't stay away. He made history because of this inability to stay away. But he also knows that winning the heavyweight championship of the world, a feat he achieved twice, isn't the remedy for all a fighter's problems.

"There's no apprenticeship with that," he told me when visiting London in October. "Once you get to be champion of the world, all kind of trouble comes your way and you have to be prepared and armed against the trouble. The weapon of mass distraction is that microphone. You can get in more trouble with a microphone and a pencil and piece of paper than a time bomb. You've got to be careful about what you say."

The very thing that first garnered Fury attention – this unpredictability, this candidness, this lack of filter – has now played a part in his downfall. Consequently, the heavyweight division has once again been blown wide open. Vacant titles are scattered among the debris. Vultures circle. Fury waits, repairs.

George Foreman says fighters must sell themselves with both their fists and their mouths.

Foreman, meanwhile, rubs his hands in anticipation.

"There are a lot of good heavyweights today and I couldn't have said that two years ago," he said. "After Tyson Fury took the title away from Wladimir Klitschko, a name was added. A strange fella, but a wild guy with a good style. Then there's Anthony Joshua. Everyone is talking about him in the boxing world. From what I've seen, and I haven't seen a whole lot of him, he is the real deal. There's no hype there. It's all about punch and ability and agility. This guy has got the package. He is distinctive. He's the maverick. He's pulled away from the herd and gone his own way. He's big and tall but he's got all the other equipment that normal-sized heavyweights have got. This guy is an athlete. He can jump and run. He's a total athlete. And there's also Deontay Wilder. On any given night either could whup the other. That's good for the state of the heavyweights. It's real good right now."

Ironically, although Fury lost what he gained after defeating Wladimir Klitschko in 2015 because of his cavalier tendencies, Foreman can't help but feel the rest of them – those heavyweights scrapping over his crumbs – would be better served taking a page out of Tyson's book and making some noise, especially Stateside.

"America is still the threshold of greatness," he said. "If you really want to be great, you've got to do it well there. A lot of the time it's not down to ability, it's all about that microphone. One of them has to say something to make people see them. Muhammad Ali was an Olympian, a boy fast on his feet, but he started screaming 'I am The Greatest!' and the public said, 'Can I see more of that? Can I hear more of that?' One of these guys – Wilder, all of them – are going to have to say something. They have to say something that comes from their heart and believe it. Then the world will recognize them."

BRITISH BOARD LOOKING INTO NEW BRAIN SCANNER

The safety of boxing continues to be a hot topic of discussion in Britain following the tragic passing of Mike Towell in September, and lately an interest has been shown in the introduction of ringside brain scanners, which would be used to detect bleeds on the brain before, during and after a contest.

"There is a long way to go and a lot of things we have to consider," Robert Smith, secretary of the British Boxing Board of Control, told me. "If we are going to bring scanners in, do we need qualified people to read the scanners? Are they 100 percent safe? Are they 100 percent accurate? Do we do it after every round? Do we do it before the fight or after the fight? These are the sort of things you need to look into. It's not as simple as someone just saying, 'Yes, we should do it.'

"This year we're going to have 256 or 257 shows in Britain, the most we've ever done. Are we going to have to cover every single show because a four-round fight is as much a danger as a 12-round fight? You're talking about logistics of the whole thing. I've spoken to doctors who say there's no point doing it and I've spoken to doctors who say it's an idea worth looking into. As a sensible regulatory body, we have to look at these things. Whether it comes in, I don't know, but we have to look into it."

TOP 10

1. TYSON FURY
2. CARL FRAMPTON
3. KELL BROOK
4. AMIR KHAN
5. LEE SELBY
6. JAMES DEGALE
7. JAMIE MCDONNELL
8. SCOTT QUIGG
9. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
10. CALLUM SMITH

11-15: Liam Smith, Tony Bellew, Terry Flanagan, Anthony Crolla, Ricky Burns.

Through fights of Nov. 20

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The Telegraph, London.

EXCERPTS FROM THE RINGTV.COM EDITOR'S POPULAR COLUMN

Doug Fischer was among those who believed the Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev decision was a robbery.

Since 2001, RingTV.com Editor Doug Fischer has held an ongoing dialog – which occasionally becomes heated debate – with boxing fans from around the world in "Dougie's Mailbag." The following excerpts are from the November 21 edition of the Monday mailbag.

ABED, who is based in Amman, Jordan, was outraged by Andre Ward's razor-thin unanimous decision over Sergey Kovalev on Nov. 19. He says the Russian controlled most of the fight with his jab and he wasn't impressed with Ward's tactics until the 10th, when he thought the American had a "brilliant round."

DOUGIE'S reply: I thought Kovalev was robbed as well, and I let Twitter's boxing community know it. Now I've got all these amateur judges giving me their take on what they called a "close fight that either man could have won." Nonsense. If Ward was the defending champion and he dropped Kovalev and dominated as much as the Russian did over the first six rounds, there's no way in hell he would have lost a decision – especially as competitive as the second half was – NO WAY IN HELL. But Las Vegas is worse than hell, and I think Burt Clements, Glenn Trowbridge and John McKaie clearly bent over backward for the American odds favorite over the second half of the fight. The manner in which the Maurice Hooker-Darleys Perez and Kovalev-Ward fights were scored on Nov. 19 sent this message to all foreign boxers who fight on American soil: The U.S. boxer will get the benefit of EVERY doubt and will win every round that is even remotely competitive, and if you do not knock the U.S. boxer out, you will NOT win the fight. I strongly favored Carl Frampton to once again outbox and outclass Leo Santa Cruz in their January rematch, but now I'm concerned about Frampton's chances due to the return bout taking place in Las Vegas.

Regarding Kovalev's jab, I agree that it was the defending light heavyweight titleholder's key punch. Too bad Kovalev didn't get the credit he deserved for working his jab so effectively against a much-ballyhooed "master boxer." I thought Kovalev was the definition of an effective aggressor. However, I think Ward was impressive in more than just Round 10 (which I scored for Kovalev, by the way). I thought Ward showed uncommon grit and resolve in Rounds 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. And I was impressed with his body punching in the middle rounds (especially Round 8). However, I do not think he won all of those rounds. Those were the close and competitive rounds (the first five or six were all Kovalev in my opinion). I thought Ward won Rounds 7, 8 and 11, but I scored Rounds 9, 10 and 12 for Kovalev.

MARK, from Cincinnati, didn't agree with the official scoring of the Kovalev-Ward fight, but being a hardcore boxing fan for more than 30 years he's seen his share of controversial decisions and accepted the outcome. The casual fans he invited to his house to watch the HBO Pay-Per-View show did not share his understanding or tolerance, although he tried his best to explain how the judges could have legitimately come to that conclusion. Mark says it's going to be "a hard sell" to get his friends to watch boxing again anytime soon, so his question to Fischer: "What would you say to the casual fan, if not to make Kovalev-Ward digestible, at least to get them to come back for Golovkin-Canelo even if they think the decision is predetermined?"

DOUGIE'S reply: I would be honest and tell them that boxing is suicidal. It's always trying to kill itself. I'd tell them: "I d ' blame you for bein turned off, and if you favor the UFC/MMA over boxing as your combat sport of choice these days, I can see why." Then I'd tell them that the only pay-per-view bout on the horizo that will be worth money is the Canelo Alvarez-Gennady Golovkin showdown. I'd explain how the middleweights' aggressive-technical styles should mesh very well in the ring, how both fighters bring large passionate fan bases to the event and how the "B-side" in this particular matchup brings his "own judges" to the dance in case the official judges try to give "the star" too much credit. Apart from Canelo-Golovkin, I'd only invite them over for non-PPV fights involving the two best fighters in a particular division (IF the matchup promises fireworks), such as Vasyl Lomachenko-Nicholas Walters, Denis Lebedev-Murat Gassiev, Joseph Parker-Andy Ruiz and Jesus Cuellar-Abner Mares. I wouldn't invite them over to watch excellent matchups that might end in a controversial decision, such as Carl Frampton-Leo Santa Cruz II, James DeGale-Badou Jack and Keith Thurman-Danny Garcia. That's a sad statement, but we can't afford to lose any more casual boxing/general sports fans.

Fischer: No closer than 115-112.

AARON, from Miami, Florida, did not think the Ward-Kovalev decision was a "robbery," as he felt it wasn't "difficult to make a case that Ward won half of the rounds" after Round 2 and he didn't think Kovalev could get "anything done on the inside and at most landed two shots at a time." Having said that, Aaron admitted to scoring the bout 115-112 for Kovalev and wondered if people angry with the decision shouldn't direct their outrage to the boxing t th t allowed all of ficials (including hree judges) to e Americans in a matchup between an American and a Russian.

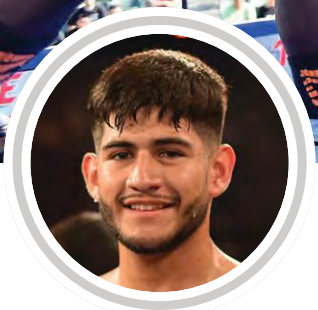
DOUGIE'S reply: I think we eed to be outraged en judges play tes. I don't think it a problem when American judges (and/or referees) are assigned to a fight between an American and foreign fighter. It shouldn't have to come down to nationalities. Boxing officials should be professional and fair regardless of where they are from. We just need better, more honorable judges.

Regarding your 115-112 tally for Kovalev, that seems to be the most common scorecard and I think it is being very nice to Ward, while being realistic and fair to the defending champion.

Regarding your opinion about it not being a robbery because it's not difficult to make a case that Ward won half the rounds and after the second, I thought Kovalev either swept the first six rounds or won four or five of the first six. All Ward did in my view was survive the first half of the bout. People who had Ward up after six or seven rounds don't need to be scoring boxing.

As for your assertion that Kovalev couldn't get anything done on the inside and at most landed two shots at a time, my response is that's all that Ward was able to get done on the inside. Why does Ward get so much credit for it? And it's not like Ward was able to stay on the inside and grind for the entire round (as he used to do at 168 pounds). Kovalev continually pushed him off and then nailed him with head-snapping shots from the outside and middle distance. RING

Alexis Rocha is the younger brother of Ronny Rios.



ALEXIS ROCHA

CANELO ALVAREZ'S FORMER SPARRING PARTNER IS QUICKLY MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF

When Alexis Rocha was asked if he wanted to spar with Canelo Alvarez to help prepare the Mexican star for his fight with James Kirkland, the amateur from Santa Ana, California, thought it was a joke.

"I said, 'You're messing with me,'" Rocha said of a conversation he had with trainer/manager Hector Lopez. "I was just an amateur. In my head I felt like, 'No one knows about me.'"

But he was wrong. Rocha, who was 17 then, had already started makng a name for himself as the talented younger brother of featherweight contender Ronny Rios. He went ahead with the sparring session, going three rounds with Canelo in the early part of the camp. While he felt a little overwhelmed, Rocha left an impression on Canelo that would bode well for his career.

"I think I held my own," Rocha said. "I know I have heavy hands and I hit him. It wasn't flush or clean, because he's so hard to hit. And I remember afterward he said I had heavy hands and good movement, and he said he was impressed. That made me feel good."

"Canelo told me the kid has a future," said Golden Boy matchmaker Robert Diaz, who set up the sparring. "Canelo said he could fight."

Fast forward a year and Rocha is making Canelo and Diaz look like a couple of soothsayers. The 19-year-old southpaw is among the crown jewels of Golden Boy's fresh stable of prospects, as he has sprinted out of the gate with a record of 5-0 (4 knockouts) since turning pro in March 2016 as a welterweight.

Blessed with power in both hands

and a professional, aggressive style already ingrained in his psyche, Rocha has turned a lot of heads since he tried to match wits with Canelo in early 2015.

"He's very aggressive and can punch," Diaz said. "I wanted to sign him from the get-go. He really is dedicated. He wants to be somebody. He gets advice from Ronny. He's surrounded by good people and really has a bright future ahead of him."

That didn't appear to be the case when he was 11 years old and struggling with his weight. Tipping the scales at around 200 pounds, Rocha was obese and on the receiving end of taunts from his classmates. While his older brothers Ronny and Salvador were pursuing professional careers, Rocha was going in the opposite direction. He resented the sport back then, he said, probably in part because of his brothers' success.

"Growing up, I used to hate boxing," said Rocha, who was scheduled to return to the ring on Dec. 16 at Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio, California. "I was a very overweight kid. There was a point where my highest was 200 pounds. I remember going to my older brothers' boxing events and I remember being bored out of my mind. Just hated it."

He started showing up at the boxing gym to work out when he was 12 and the pounds began to melt away, close to 65 over six months, he says. Meanwhile, his appreciation for the sport began to grow. He was hooked by the time he made his amateur debut at 13, scoring a second-round knockout.

"I remember I trained so hard for that fight," he said. "Ever since that, I said to myself, 'If I really dedicate myself to this and stick to this, I can get somewhere from this.'"

Rocha, who went 58-5 as an amateur, looks forward to the time when he will step up in competition. Who knows? Maybe he could even face Canelo down the road in a rematch of their sparring session.

"I've thought about that," Rocha said with a laugh. "That's a dream of mine. But I have to focus on what I'm doing now. I can't overlook anything and look into the future because I have to take care of the present. That's one of the things my brother (Ronny) taught me – don't ever overlook anyone." RING

THE ESSENTIALS
ALEXIS ROCHA

Age: 19

Weight class: Welterweight

Height: 5 feet 10 inches

Stance: Southpaw

Hometown: Santa Ana, California

Record: 5-0 (4 KOs)

Biggest strengths: A fast starter who has power in both hands, Rocha is aggressive without being reckless. He goes to the body well and is partial to a quick left uppercut he likes to deliver off the jab. He's also a good finisher, quick to jump an opponent who is hurt. He has also evolved from someone who rushed his shots to a more patient predator, a sign he's working in the gym to improve.

Biggest question marks: Because the big puncher is always looking to deliver a decisive blow, he can sometimes square up to his opponent. That can make him an easy target for counters. Rocha keeps his hands up but doesn't seem to move his head a lot, so it will be interesting to see how he deals with more dangerous fighters who have the capacity to hurt him.

VAUGHN ALEXANDER
MIDDLEWEIGHT

Alexander (6-0, 5 KOs) is the older brother of former two-division champion Devon Alexander and is resuming his career after he served 11 years for armed robbery and assault. A former amateur standout, Alexander was a blue-chip prospect before he went away. Main Events announced it had signed him in November with the hopes of resuscitating the 30-year-old's career.

CARLOS BALDERAS
LIGHTWEIGHT

The 2016 U.S. Olympian recently signed a promotional deal with former Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer, becoming the first boxer to sign with his new firm, Ringstar Sports. The 20-year-old reached the Olympic quarterfinals in Rio this past summer and has lost just nine times out of 184 amateur fights. He is considered an elite prospect with commercial appeal outside of the ring and plans to make his pro debut around February 2017.

SCOTT FITZGERALD
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT

Fitzgerald (5-0, 3 KOs) is a former top amateur who won gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. The Englishman, who signed with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing, turned pro on the February 27 Carl Frampton-Scott Quigg card and had already fought five times by late November. He has good head movement, an aggressive style and goes to the body well, and is starting to pick up his level of competition.

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

'IT WAS PERFECT'

CECILIA BRAEKHUS RELISHES THE LONG-AWAITED RETURN OF BOXING TO HER ADOPTED HOMELAND

As cliche as it may sound, when undisputed welterweight champion Cecilia Braekhus ascended the ropes following her second-round TKO of Anne Sophie Mathis and stared out into the sold-out crowd at The Spectrum in Oslo, Norway, time stood still.

"It was a moment when I felt like I'm home and I'm accepted," she said of her post-victory celebration on October 1. "I'm accepted for what I'm doing and who I am. That was the first time it hit me."

But this was no mere homecoming for the "First Lady."

Professional boxing was illegal in Norway for more than three decades. Since 1981, the decree dubbed the "Knockout Law" banned any sport that included knockouts. Technically, amateur boxing was allowed but only because of the headgear involved. When AIBA removed headgear for senior men, the amateurs were down for the count as well.

So the Colombian-born Braekhus, the pound-

Cecilia Braekhus (top right) had the support of a fellow star on her historic night.

AP

for-pound queen of her sport, unbeaten and owner of five welterweight titles, was unable to fight in the country she has called home since she was adopted at 2 years old. Worse than that, she and her fighting peers were the targets of those denigrating the sport.

"Boxing was considered a criminal offense, so you could go to jail," she said. "But we are not criminals, and I couldn't allow a country to treat their fighters like people who deserve to be in jail. It's wrong and crazy, and this couldn't continue. People are free to make their own choices and what they want to do with their life."

And Braekhus was free to fight the ban. For seven years, she engaged in media blitzes, lobbied politicians and took every chance she had to let Norway know that boxers were not thugs, but athletes just trying to make a living doing what they loved.

"We had to make people realize that an idea like (banning boxing) is absolutely insane in a free country," she said. "It was a long road because people who don't know boxing, they don't understand it, and when you don't know something, it's easier to say you don't want it. So it takes a lot of time and effort to present the sport, and I also have to be very active, and people have to know that boxers are regular people. Then it's not so scary anymore. It was very important to get the media and public on our side, of course, but we were also working a lot against the politicians. We were working on different angles all the time."

Braekhus and all Norwegian boxers won their fight in December 2014. It was a close decision, 54-48, but with Parliament repealing the "Knockout Law," professional boxing was a reality again. The First Lady got her homecoming.

All 10,000 tickets were sold in eight hours, Prime Minister Erna Solberg and former world heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko (with fiancee Hayden Panettiere) were ringside and Michael Buffer did the honors on the microphone at center ring.

"Of course there was a lot of pressure," Braekhus said. "If anything went really wrong that night, then maybe professional boxing would never be back in Norway. But my main focus was all the positivity. We had a sold-out crowd of 10,000 people and almost a third of the Norwegian population was watching the fight. So basically, there was so much interest in boxing and there was a lot of pressure, but it was mostly people who wanted to see me do well."

Braekhus did well, stopping Mathis (whom she had outpointed in 2012) in just two rounds – her first knockout victory since 2013. It was as perfect an ending as you can get in a sport with too few of them.

"You know what, (the fight to repeal the ban) was worth it, and it was even better than I had expected," she said. "Sometimes when you fight for something for so long and it comes to the point where you actually achieve it, it's almost a little bit of an anticlimax. But this night, it was perfect. It was better than I ever dreamed it would be. I wouldn't trade one second of the night."

So what can the 35-year-old Braekhus possibly do for an encore? First, she has a mandatory defense to make. Then she has her sights set on possibly fighting mixed martial arts star Cris "Cyborg" Justino in a boxing match that she hopes will take place in the United States.

So is America ready for the First Lady?

"I hope so," she laughs, "because I'm coming." RING

AMANDA SERRANO
Wins title in fourth division

It took WBO featherweight champion Amanda Serrano only 44 seconds to add another title belt to her collection on October 18, as she quickly finished Hungary's Alexandra Lazar to take the vacant WBO junior featherweight title. That made the 28-year-old southpaw a four-division titleholder (122, 126, 130, 135), equaling the feat of Miguel Cotto. No other Puerto Rican fighter has done it. No word yet on what division Ms. Serrano will settle into, though it would be nice to see a featherweight superfight with fellow power-puncher Jelena Mrdjenovich.

1. **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 29-0 (8 KOs)
Welterweight

2. **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 37-1 (16 KOs)
Lightweight

3. **YESICA YOLANDA BOPP**
Argentina • 30-1 (12 KOs)
Junior flyweight

4. **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 37-10-1 (19 KOs)
Featherweight

5. **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 28-4-3 (4 KOs)
Flyweight

6. **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 38-13-5 (9 KOs)
Lightweight

7. **ERICA ANABELLA FARIAS**
Argentina • 24-1 (10 KOs)
Junior welterweight

8. **IBETH ZAMORA SILVA**
Mexico • 26-5 (11 KOs)
Junior flyweight

9. **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 48-1-2 (28 KOs)
Junior bantamweight

10. **AMANDA SERRANO**
U.S. • 30-1-1 (23 KOs)
Featherweight

Through fights of Nov. 20, 2016

the decades, The Ring
become the symbol of
The Ring
Thank you for the memories Champ.

RINGSIDE REPORTS

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM

Manny Pacquiao (left) showed Jessie Vargas that he can still bring it at 37.

MANNY PACQUIAO UD 12 JESSIE VARGAS

Date: Nov. 5
Site: Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas
Division: Welterweight
Weights: Pacquiao 144.8 pounds, Vargas 146.5
RING ratings (before fight): Pacquiao not rated; Vargas No. 8
Network: Top Rank PPV

Governments across the world are filled with senators who address themselves as honorable. But there's only one who can call himself champ. Meet the Honorable Manny Pacquiao, Senator Champ.

Pacquiao restored the championship part to his name with the WBO 147-pound title he took from a game yet overmatched Jessie Vargas. A Pacquiao with a boxing title, not a political title, is the one remembered in every part of the world outside of the Philippines.

At 37 years old, the fighter with belts in eight weight classes on his Hall of Fame resume is not exactly the same anymore. If he had been, his knockout drought wouldn't be at seven years and counting. Make no mistake, his punches still sting. Vargas' badly bloodied right eye was evidence of that.

But the opponents he would have stopped a decade ago are withstanding his punches now. Vargas did, although he was dropped by a straight left in the second round and it often looked as if he was close to getting stopped in the late rounds.

"I was cautious," said Pacquiao (59-6-2, 38 knockouts), who collected at least $4 million and a percentage of the PPV buys that were reported to be between 220,000 and 300,000. "I didn't want to get drawn in and hit by a counter. I felt like I could do more. With every round, I thought I got closer to a knockout."

But the KO never came, in part because of Vargas' inherent toughness and some power of his own, especially in a dangerous right hand.

"I thought it was a very close fight," said Vargas (27-2, 10 KOs), who earned a career-high $2.8 million. "It was a very fast chess match."

What's next? Pacquiao skipped the post-fight news conference because of a 12th-round head butt that left him with a nasty cut requiring 16 stitches. After a trip to the emergency room, he was headed back to the Philippines. His work in the Filipino Senate resumed on the Tuesday after the judges' 118-109, 114-113 and 118-109 scores were announced.

The post-fight discussion was dominated by more intense speculation about who and when he'll fight next. Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s presence in the crowd of 16,123 guaranteed that.

Immediately, a buzz went through the crowd about a rematch of their revenue record-setter in an otherwise disappointing bout in May 2015. May 2017 has been mentioned. But so have a lot of other possibilities.

For Mayweather, talk about some kind of fight with UFC star Conor McGregor continues to circulate. It's hard to know if it's serious, but it's there on Twitter and every other social media platform.

For Pacquiao, there's Terence Crawford, who was also at ringside in a break from training for his December 10 date with John Molina in hometown Omaha.

"We'll see," said the senator, a champ who knows that boxing is as hard to predict as politics. »

WORLDWIDE RESULTS— Go to: bit.ly/worldwide-results or scan the QR code to see weekly fight results at RingTV.com.

NO. 8 RICKY BURNS UD 12 KIRYL RELIKH

Oct. 7, Glasgow, Scotland (Sky Sports)

Make room for a surprising contender on the ballot for Fight of the Year. Ricky Burns and Kiryl Relikh fought their way into consideration with a back-and-forth battle for a 140-pound title.

Burns prevailed, retaining the WBA belt, but not without a challenge from Relikh, a Belarusian promoted by Ricky Hatton.

Burns said he hid his surprise and perhaps pain behind a poker face. His look betrayed no worries. But there were plenty in his mind, especially in the face of a persistent pursuit from Relikh (21-1, 19 KOs).

"He could whack," said Burns (41-5-1, 14 KOs) after winning a 116-112, 118-110, 116-112 decision. "There were a couple of times when he shook me with body shots and head shots, but I managed to hide it from him."

Next stop? Burns hoped to take his poker face to Vegas, perhaps against Adrien Broner.

NO. 4 TONY BELLEW TKO 3 BJ FLORES

Oct. 15, Liverpool, U.K. (Sky Sports)

Tony Bellew had the bully pulpit and he used it, blowing away BJ Flores while calling out David Haye.

Flores had no answer to Bellew's assault. Neither did Haye.

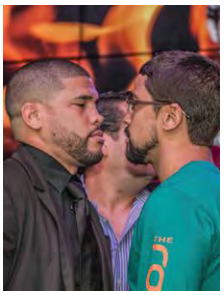
The busy Bellew (28-2-1, 18 KOs) started trash-talking Haye, who was in a ringside seat working as commentator for the bout's telecast, from a neutral corner after the first round. He knocked down Flores (32-3-1, 20 KOs) four times, finishing the American in the third with a left hook.

"He got smashed, David Haye, your nightclub playmate," shouted Bellew, having successfully defended his WBC cruiserweight title for the first time. "You will get smashed, David Haye. I will put you and that pathetic haircut to sleep."

No problem, promoter Eddie Hearn said.

"Tony means it when he says he wants to fight Haye," he said. "They have history."

And it appears he will fight Haye: They agreed shortly before our deadline to fight on March 4 in London.



JUAN MANUEL LOPEZ TKO 11 WILFREDO VAZQUEZ

Oct. 29, San Juan, Puerto Rico (Integrated Sports Media PPV)

There was a brawl. Then there was a riot.

Juan Manuel Lopez stopped bitter rival Wilfredo Vazquez Jr. in the 11th round and then engaged in some extracurricular violence by trading punches with Vazquez trainer Albert Rivera.

The wild aftermath to a tension-filled, 129-pound bout ended within seconds but not without police rushing into the ring as the crowd tossed debris.

The volatile Lopez (35-5, 32 KOs), who finished Vazquez (24-7-1, 19 KOs) with a left at 2:29 of the 11th, took a shot as big as any from Rivera, who knocked him into the ropes with a left hook.

Lopez, an ex-titleholder at 122 and 126 pounds, said he wanted a shot at another belt. But his future looked uncertain. The Puerto Rican Boxing Commission suspended him and Rivera for an undetermined time as it reviewed the incident.

NO. 6 JESSIE MAGDALENO UD 12 NO. 3 NONITO DONAIRE

Nov. 5, Las Vegas (Top Rank PPV)

Toughness followed speed. Iron complemented quicksilver.

Jessie Magdaleno possessed a mother lode of it all in an alloy that Nonito Donaire couldn't capture and then couldn't break.

Magdaleno (24-0, 17 KOs) took the WBO's 122-pound belt from Donaire (37-4, 24 KOs), scoring a unanimous decision, first with speed that scored often and easily. Magdaleno suffered a cut above his left eye in the fourth round, but it didn't trouble him. Nothing did.

From the eighth round, a slower Magdaleno caught repeated right hands from a surprised Donaire.

"Losing never crossed my mind," Donaire said.

But he couldn't finish Magdaleno. Donaire's big right rocked Magdaleno's head, sending his brightly dyed shock of hair flying in every direction. Blows buckled his legs at the knees. But nothing could send him into defeat on a night when he surprised some critics with great conditioning. And nothing did.

NO. 8 OSCAR VALDEZ TKO 7 HIROSHIGE OSAWA

Nov. 5, Las Vegas (Top Rank PPV)

Oscar Valdez went to his knees in thanks. He celebrated on top of trainer Manny Robles' shoulders. He cried. He screamed. Above all, he won.

A first-time featherweight titleholder took the first step in a run that might make him a longtime champ, blowing away Japan's Hiroshige Osawa with a seventh-round TKO.

Valdez (21-0, 19 KOs), a two-time Mexican Olympian who grew up in Arizona, appeared tentative early. The unknown Osawa (30-4-4, 19 KOs) was taller and had a four-inch advantage in reach. But he had little else.

A deliberate Valdez figured that out with devastating certainty in the fourth round. He floored Osawa with a left as precise as it was long.

The inevitable was three rounds away. Valdez landed another left, backing up Osawa. Valdez pursued, step for step, with punches that left the Japanese fighter defenseless and finished against the ropes.

ZOU SHIMING
UD 12
PRASITSAK PHAPROM
Nov. 5, Las Vegas (Top Rank PPV)

Sometimes it was dull. Often it was funny. In the end, it was a first, at least for Zou Shiming.

An improving Zou (9-1, 2 KOs), already a Chinese icon for three Olympic medals, added to the legend with his first pro title – the WBO's flyweight version – with a win over Thailand's Prasitsak Phaprom (39-2-2, 24 KOs) that was unanimous on the scorecards and one-sided in every way.

Zou eluded most of Phaprom's punches with his reach and quick feet, but his biggest victory might have been the audience that watched him. His promoter, Bob Arum, guessed that nearly 100 million Chinese fans saw the bout. Zou's recent appearance in a reality show drew a reported 75 million viewers on Hunan Television.

"The ratings for his reality show dwarfed anything the Kardashians did," Arum said.

Dwarfed anything Floyd Mayweather Jr. did too.

NO. 1 JAMIE MCDONNELL
UD 12
LIBORIO SOLIS
Nov. 12, Monte Carlo, Monaco (Sky Sports)

Jamie McDonnell got most of the points. Most of the boos, too.

McDonnell seemed to struggle against a clever and quick Liborio Solis, yet the scorecards seemed to say that he had an easy night.

He didn't.

McDonnell (29-2-1, 13 KOs) suffered a bloody nose early and appeared to have no counter for the overall speed of repeated power shots from Solis (25-5-1, 11 KOs), a former 115-pound titleholder from Venezuela.

Yet the U.K. bantamweight won 117-111, 116-112, 115-113 on the cards.

"We wanted a hard 12 rounds," McDonnell told ringside media as the boos still echoed through the Monaco arena. "I felt in control. I'm a little gutted, listening to your comments. It is what it is."

Solis was a little bit more specific. It, he said, was a robbery.

NO. 4 GEORGE GROVES
UD 12 **EDUARD GUTKNECHT**
Nov. 18, London (Channel 5, U.K.)

Eduard Gutknecht, a Kazakhstani super middleweight living in Germany, underwent emergency surgery after losing a punishing decision to George Groves

According to the U.K.'s Press Association, Gutknecht "fell ill" after losing 119-109, 119-110, 119-109 to Groves at Wembley's SSE Arena. He was still in an induced coma four days after the bout.

Gutknecht (35-5-1, 13 KOs) suffered a bad cut over his left eye in the ninth round, but continued through the 12th against Groves (25-3, 18 KOs), who hopes for a fourth shot at a major title next year.

Groves canceled a post-fight news conference when he learned of Gutknecht's condition.

Before he was told Gutknecht had been rushed to the hospital, Groves told London's Channel 5: "I set a great tempo and busted him up badly. I am surprised he made it to the bell. Gutknecht is a tough character."

CLARESSA SHIELDS
UD 4
FRANCHON CREWS
Nov. 19, Las Vegas (HBO PPV)

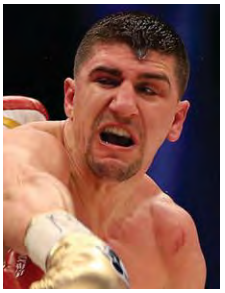
Claressa Shields had something to prove. Not to Franchon Crews. And not to everyone who watched her win two Olympic gold medals. Instead, she wanted to prove Sergey Kovalev wrong.

She did, beating Crews in her pro debut in the best bout on an otherwise dreary undercard before Kovalev's loss to Andre Ward.

Kovalev, whose promoter is Kathy Duva, said he didn't approve of women boxing. She asked Ward's promoter, Roc Nation, to make sure a TV was in Kovalev's dressing room

"Because the goal in this fight is for me to ask, 'Hey did you watch my fight? What'd you think?' said Shields, who scored a four-round shutout of Crews (0-1). "And for him to say, 'Yeah, wow, you are a very good fighter. You have very good skills.' Or he can keep being sexist.

"It's the fact of: Watch me before you commentate on me."



NO. 5 MARCO HUCK
UD 12
DMYTRO KUCHER
Nov. 19, Hanover, Germany (RTL-Germany, Box Nation)

Marco Huck likes to call himself the world's best cruiserweight. Emerging Oleksandr Usyk might have something to say about that.

For now, however, Huck (40-3-1, 27 KOs) kept his claim alive with a 117-111, 119-109, 117-111 decision over Dmytro Kucher (24-2-1, 18 KOs), a Ukrainian with dangerous power.

"I always thought that you have something to prove as a real champion," he said before a victory he hopes will lead to a date with the U.K.'s Tony Bellew. "I see myself as the best cruiserweight in the world. So I have a special responsibility."

Nothing Huck did against Kucher probably frightened Bellew, much less Usyk. But he said he fought for eight rounds with a fractured knuckle on his right hand and was still able to batter, bloody and bruise a powerful yet ponderous Kucher, especially throughout a one-sided eighth.

Terence Crawford (second from left) is scheduled to defend his RING 140-pound title against John Molina (second from right) on December 10.

DECEMBER

TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. JOHN MOLINA

Date: Dec. 10
Location: Omaha, Nebraska
Division: Junior welterweights (for Crawford's RING, WBC and WBO titles)
RING Ratings: Crawford champion; Molina No. 8
TV: HBO
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Also fighting: Mason Menard vs. Raymundo Beltran, lightweights; Sean Monaghan vs. Fernando Castaneda, light heavyweights.
Significance: Crawford (29-0, 20 KOs) has become one of the most-respected fighters in the world, punctuating a strong run with a one-sided victory over Viktor Postol to win the RING title in July. He appears to have it all. Molina (29-6, 23 KOs) has won consecutive fights – including a decision over Ruslan Provodnikov in June – after losing three in a row but probably isn't a serious threat to Crawford because of his limited skills and athleticism. Molina has a puncher's chance.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Crawford KO 7; Fischer – Crawford KO 9; Harty – Crawford KO 8; Abramson – Crawford KO 8

JESUS CUELLAR VS. ABNER MARES

Date: Dec. 10
Location: Los Angeles, California
Division: Featherweights
RING Ratings: Mares No. 5; Cuellar No. 7
TV: Showtime
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Also fighting: Jermall Charlo (No. 3) vs. Julian Williams (No. 8), junior middleweights (for Charlo's IBF title); Sergey Lipinets vs. Leonardo Zappavigna, junior welterweights.
Significance: The principals were scheduled to meet on June 25 but the fight was canceled because Mares failed an eye exam. That delay has kept Cuellar (28-1, 21 KOs) out of the ring for a year and Mares, who finally got clearance in October to fight in California, hasn't fought since losing to Leo Santa Cruz in August 2015. Cuellar is the hotter fighter, having taken down a series of recognizable opponents the past few years. Mares (29-2-1, 15 KOs) is at a crossroads. The former three-division titleholder, now 31, can't afford another high-profile setback.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Mares UD; Fischer – Cuellar UD; Harty – Cuellar UD; Abramson – Mares UD

JOSEPH PARKER VS. ANDY RUIZ

Date: Dec. 10
Location: Auckland, New Zealand
Division: Heavyweights (for the vacant WBO title)
RING Ratings: Parker No. 6; Ruiz

No. 10
TV: HBO (delayed)
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★ ★ ★ ★
Also fighting: Jeff Horn vs. Ali Funeka, welterweights.
Significance: Both fighters will be trying to make history, as the winner will become the first heavyweight born in his country (Parker in New Zealand, Ruiz in Mexico) to win a major title. Parker (21-0, 18 KOs) has solid skills and good puncher power. Ruiz (29-0, 19 KOs) is remarkably quick and athletic for a pudgy heavyweight and he can box, but he can't match Parker's power. The WBO title was stripped from Tyson Fury.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Ruiz UD; Fischer – Parker UD; Harty – Parker KO 10; Abramson – Parker UD

BERNARD HOPKINS VS. JOE SMITH JR.

Date: Dec. 17
Location: Inglewood, California
Division: Light heavyweights
RING Ratings: Smith No. 7; Hopkins unrated
TV: HBO
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Also fighting: Oleksandr Usyk (No. 2) vs. Thabiso Mchunu, cruiserweights (for Usyk's WBO title); Joseph Diaz Jr. (No. 9) vs. Horacio Garcia, featherweights.
Significance: This is the 51-year-old Hopkins' goodbye fight after a great career that began in 1988. And he didn't choose a pushover as an opponent. Hopkins (55-7-2, 32 KOs) would've been justified in selecting an easy mark in light of his age and his one-sided loss to Sergey Kovalev in November 2014. That wouldn't be Hopkins, though. He chose a hard-punching foe in Smith (22-1, 18 KOs) who stopped Andrzej Fonfara in the first round in his most recent fight.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Hopkins UD; Fischer – Hopkins UD; Harty – Hopkins MD; Abramson – Smith UD

DEC. 10 – Anthony Joshua (No. 5) vs. Eric Molina, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF title), Manchester, England (Showtime). Also, Luis Ortiz (No. 4) vs. David Allen, heavyweights; Scott Quigg vs. Jose Cayetano, featherweights; and Luis Concepcion (No. 5) vs. Khalid Yafai (No. 7), junior bantamweights (for Concepcion's WBA title).
DEC. 10 – Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. vs. Dominik Britsch, super middleweights, Monterrey, Mexico (beIN Sports Espanol).
DEC. 10 – Eleider Alvarez (No. 4) vs. Norbert Dabrowski, light heavyweights, Montreal.
DEC. 10 – Krzysztof Wlodarczyk vs. Leon Harth, cruiserweights, Wroclaw, Poland.
DEC. 16 – Vyacheslav Shabranskyy (No. 7) vs. Sullivan Barrera, light heavyweights, Indio, Calif. (HBO Latino). Also, Antonio Orozco (No. 4) vs. Fidel Maldonado Jr., junior welterweights.
DEC. 17 – Alexander Povetkin vs. Bermane Stiverne (No. 7), heavyweights, Ekaterinburg, Russia.
DEC. 23 – Artur Beterbiev (No. 5) vs. Isidro Ranoni Prieto, light heavyweights, Gatineau, Canada
DEC. 30 – Naoya Inoue (No. 1) vs. Kohei Kono (No. 8), junior bantamweights (for Inoue's WBO title), Tokyo. Also, Akira Yaegashi (No. 4) vs. Milan Melindo (No. 6), junior flyweights (for Yaegashi's IBF title).
DEC. 31 – Moises Fuentes (No. 10) vs. Kosei Tanaka, junior flyweights (for the vacant WBO title), Nagoya, Japan (beIN Sports Espanol, delayed).
DEC. 31 – Jonathan Guzman (No. 8) vs. Yukinori Oguni, junior featherweights (for Guzman's IBF title), Kyoto, Japan. Also, Kazuto Ioka vs. Stamp Kiatniwat, flyweights (for Ioka's WBA title); Lee Haskins (No. 4) vs. Shohei Omori, bantamweights (for Haskins' IBF title).
DEC. 31 – Jezreel Corrales (No. 5) vs. Takashi Uchiyama (No. 6), junior lightweights (for Corrales' WBA title), Japan. Also, Ryoichi Taguchi vs. Carlos Canizales, junior flyweights (for Taguchi's WBA title).

JANUARY

JAN. 14 – Badou Jack (No. 2) vs. James DeGale (No. 1), super middleweights (for vacant RING, Jack's WBC and DeGale's IBF titles), Brooklyn, New York (Showtime). Also, Jose Pedraza (No. 7) vs. Gervonta Davis, junior lightweights (for Pedraza's IBF title.)
JAN. 28 – Carl Frampton (No. 2) vs. Leo Santa Cruz (No. 4), featherweights (for Frampton's WBA title), Las Vegas (Showtime). Also, Dejan Zlaticanin (No. 1) vs. Mikey Garcia, lightweights (for Zlaticanin's WBC title).

FEBRUARY

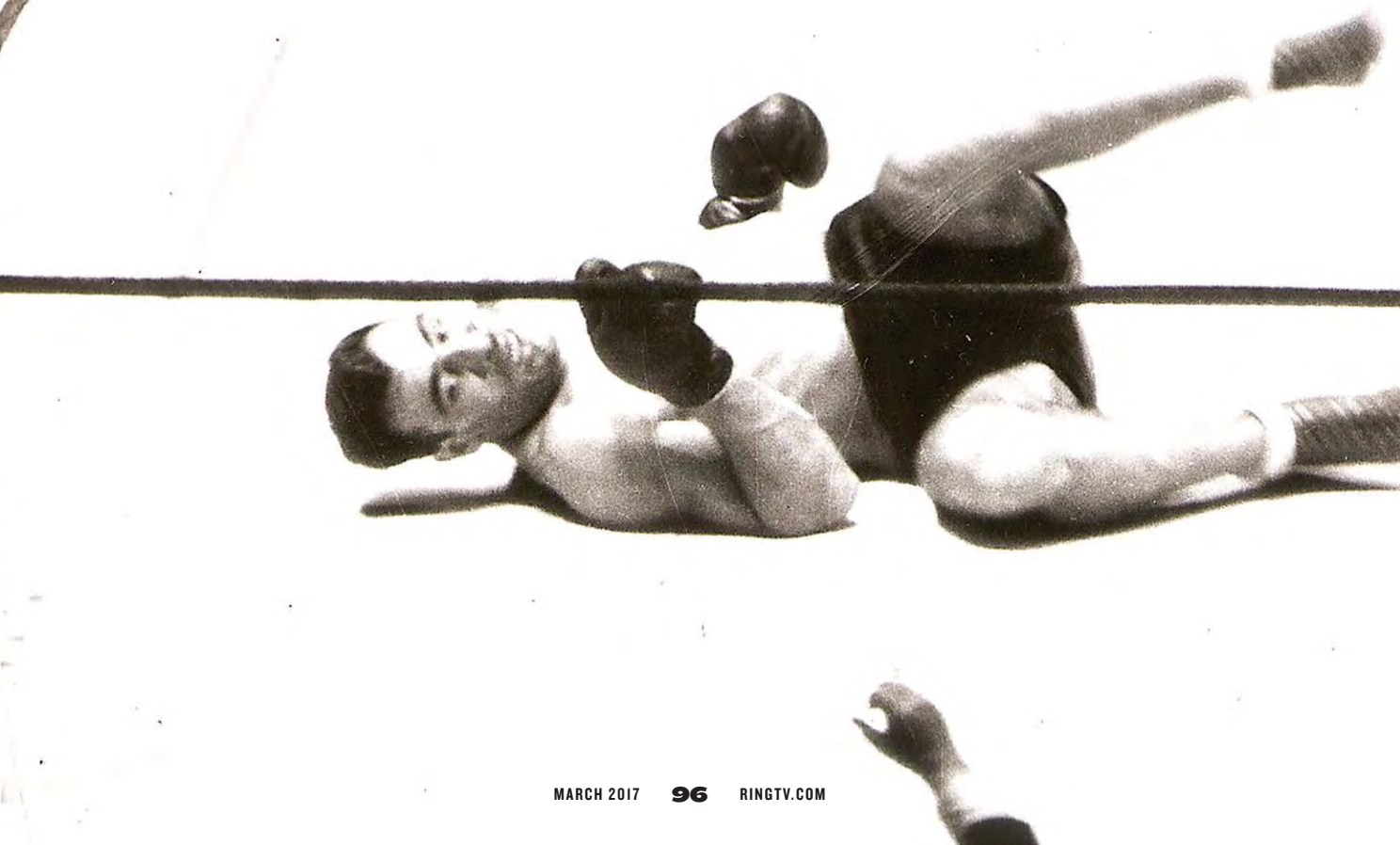
FEB. 11 – Adrien Broner (No. 2) vs. Adrian Granados (No. 5), junior welterweights, TBA (Showtime).

MARCH

MARCH 4 – Keith Thurman (No. 2) vs. Danny Garcia (No. 7), welterweights (for Thurman's WBA and Garcia's WBC titles), TBA (Showtime).
MARCH 4 – Tony Bellew (No. 3 cruiserweight) vs. David Haye (No. 9), heavyweight, London (Sky Box Office).

BIG GAME HUNTER

Primo Carnera is one of the more unfortunate figures in boxing history. The Ambling Alp was an Italian version of Sasquatch, a broad, 6-foot 6-inch giant who was more of a curiosity than a real boxer. Carnera built a good record (88-14, 71 knockouts) between 1928 and 1946 – regularly pounding relatively tiny foes into oblivion – but many believed he was also closely connected to mobsters, who allegedly weren't adverse to paying opponents willing to lose intentionally. In other words, he was an enormous illusion. Max Baer (at right in this photo) demonstrated that when he fought then-heavyweight champ Carnera on June 14, 1934, in Queens, New York. Baer, a strapping physical specimen himself and a decent boxer, obviously wasn't among those on the take: He put a helpless Carnera down as many as 10 times (depending on the report you read) before the slaughter was finally stopped in the 11th of 15 scheduled rounds. Neither fighter did much afterward. Baer, averse to training, famously lost the title to James "Cinderella Man" Braddock in his next fight. Carnera was stopped by Joe Louis in the first round the following year and concluded his career with a string of losses to no-name opponents. They both landed on their feet in the end, though. The gregarious Baer carved out a fairly successful career as a character actor in the movies and Carnera, who also appeared in a few films, became a popular professional wrestler.



#ATTHEFIGHTS

By **Lamar Clark**

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Celebrities attending the Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev fight at T-Mobile Arena n Las Vegas included (clockwise om top left): Marshawn Lynch, Andre erto, Charles Barkley, Dave Chappelle, ephen A. Smith and Lennox Lewis.

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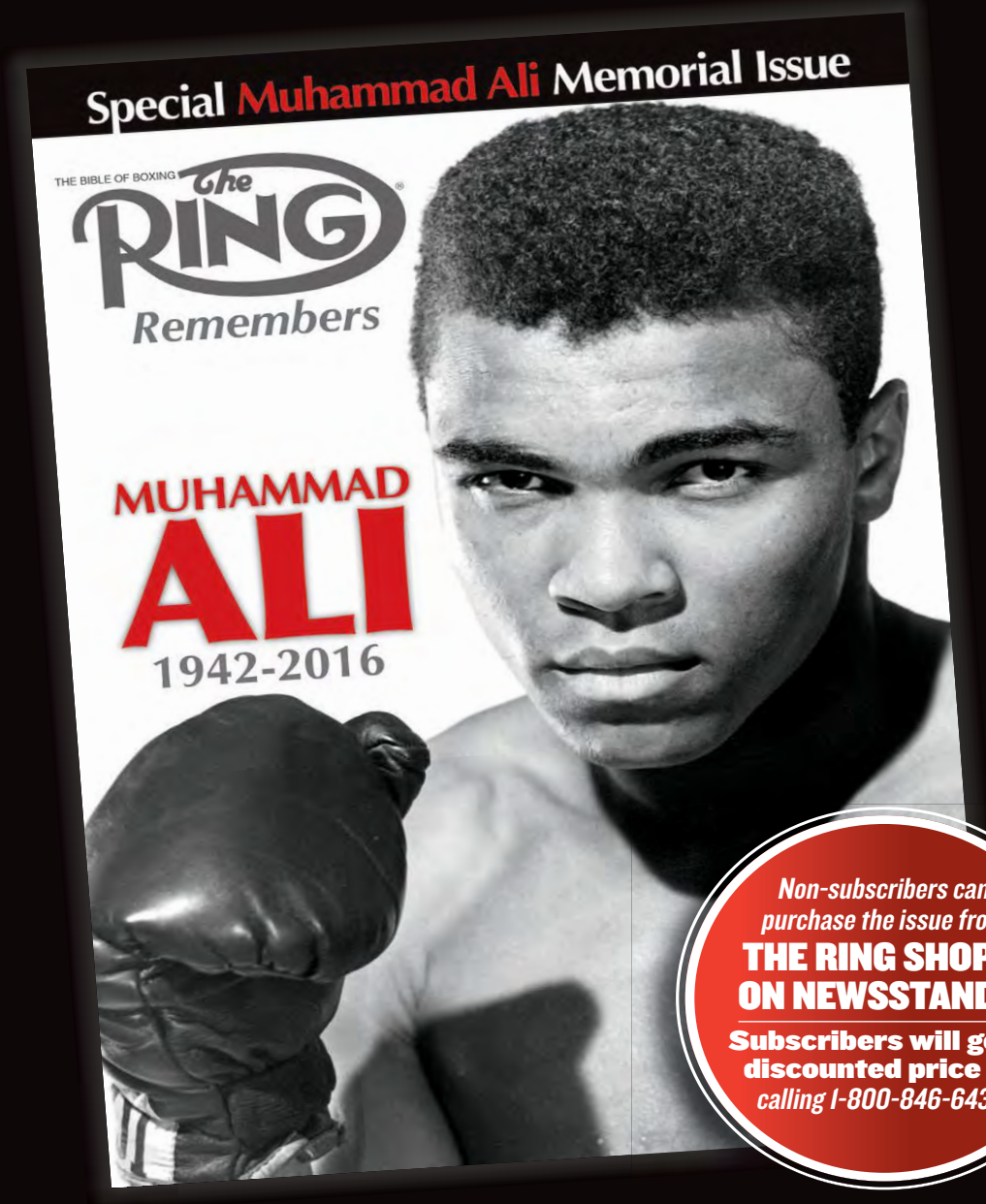

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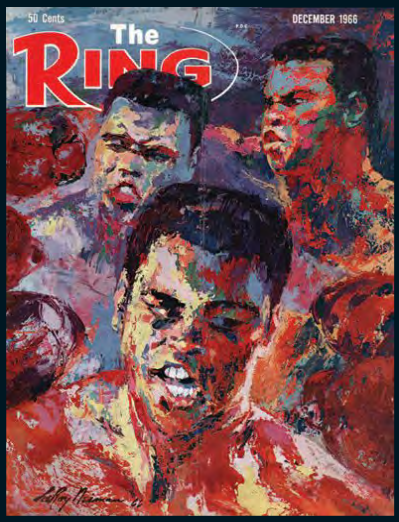

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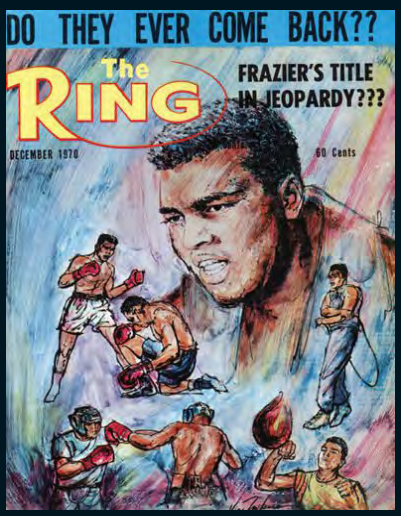

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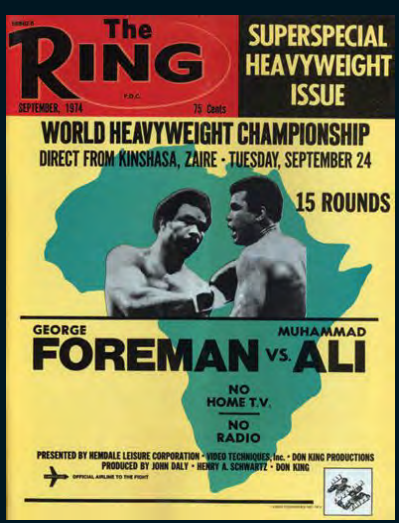

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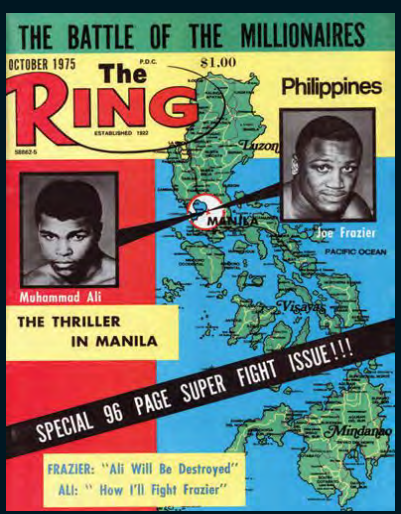

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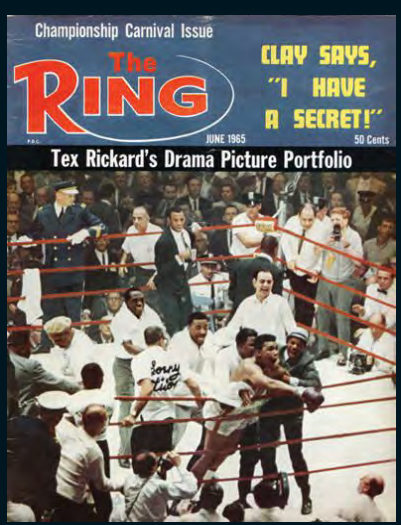

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